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Poor Pirates!

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—A STORY OF MODERN FREEBOOTERS IN THE DRY TORTUGAS WHO BLINDLY TEAR
A TRAGIC PAGE OUT OF THE BLOOD-STAINED PAST OF PIRACY

By George Allan England

THE long, slim yacht Vagabond—polished brass and polished passengers—somewhat slackened her speed. For now she was reaching shoal water, with her approach to Garden Key. The group luxuriating in wicker chairs beneath the awning aft, tuned up their interest to the extraordinary spectacle ahead.

The authentic highballs that Sukui, the Jap steward, had just brought in dew-beaded glasses took second place. Unnoticed remained the entrancing seascapes of swooning emerald patched with dazzles of ultramarine, such as you find only in the Gulf of Mexico. For the tropic island now clearly looming to view claimed precedence over everything.

Singular island, indeed!

More than three hours the Vagabond, with her crew of twelve men, under command of Captain Matt Herriland, and with her seven passengers, had been cut-

ting westward through the Gulf, bound from Key West to Dry Tortugas. And now at last, in late afternoon, Garden Key—strangest of those romantic islands—was drawing near.

"Amazing, isn't it?" Langdon Minot exclaimed.

He was a banker, and owned the yacht, as well as a great deal of Miami and no small fraction of New York City. Tossing his half-smoked cigar overboard, he took up his prism binoculars from the wicker table.

These he focused on the island. The glare of sea and sky made his jovial blue eyes squint in their fat-bagged orbits.

"I know buildings when I see 'em, but this gets me!" Minot added. "A building like that, out here a hundred and twenty miles from the Florida mainland—it doesn't seem possible!"

"That structure, sir," Professor Alcibi-

ades Saltmarsh, Ph. D., put in, "is said to have cost the United States government one dollar for each brick. It is estimated to contain forty million bricks. This is doubtless inaccurate. I should have to make an exact count of them, sir, before I could—"

"Let me look, dad!" Judith Minot cried, tapping her cigarette from its carved Chinese ivory holder into a brass tray on the table. In cool white linen yachting things, she was as slimly graceful for her twenty-four years as her father—despite linen equally immaculate—was chunkily cumbersome for his sixty-two. "Let me look! Don't be such an awful pig!"

"Thanks, Judy! Do you refer to my manners or my figure, dear child?" the banker queried. "In either case, I resent the aspersion!"

"Allow me," Roger Hull murmured, and handed Judith his own binoculars, even more powerful than his host's.

"Oh, corking!" she ejaculated. As she arose, went to the rail, and focused through the quivering heat haze on the island, Hull took a place beside her. Brent Van Kleek, as usual a fraction too slow, had to give his own glasses to Beryl Chatfield, whom he detested as much as he loved Judith's millions.

"Damn the interloper!" Van was thinking. His long, rather bony fingers drummed impatiently on the arm of his wicker chair. Small wonder; for did not Van look on Judith and her prospects as his own?

Did he not also know all about old Minot's high blood pressure, that might at any shock remove the banker from this mundane sphere? Until now the cruise had been going well enough, and Van had been making reasonable progress with Judith. But now—

"Damn the bounder!" Van Kleek mentally repeated. He solaced himself with a stiff drink, and fondled his close-clipped, straw-hued mustache. "What the devil right has a total stranger like Hull got to swim so infernally well? Get acquainted with Minot at Miami, get himself invited to finish out the cruise, and make himself so damned obnoxious?"

The obnoxious stranger, however, if he felt Van's animosity at all, gave it no heed. He had no ears for the trite adjectives of Beryl, nor yet for the professor's statistics. Indifferent to everything but Judith, he was now explaining the gigantic abandoned

fortress that covered nearly the entire island.

"There's the sally port, Miss Minot, where they used to lead the prisoners in, alive, and usually carry 'em out, dead. And there's the forsaken lighthouse—and see the wreck of the coaling station? The nineteen-nineteen hurricane knocked it for a goal. Said to be several million in pirate gold buried there."

"Pirates? I'd give worlds to see a pirate!" the girl exclaimed as she lowered her glasses and looked up at Hull with eager dark eyes. "I'd love a pirate!"

"Lucky pirate! Well, there used to be lots of 'em down this way. Lots of fine, hand-picked mysteries in the Dry Tortugas, too. I took a cruise down here in twenty-two. Not another place like this in the world. Legends, murders, ghosts, and such things till you can't rest."

Roger Hull smiled down at her wonderment. His smile revealed large, strong teeth. A large, strong young man he was.

When he had pitched for the junior nine at college, his nickname was "Sammy," which had been derived from "Samson." And in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, he had carried off the laurels in several ring battles.

Hull appeared like a fighter and a tactician combined. A tendency to freckles and a certain dry shrewdness by no means detracted from his reasonably good looks.

"Murders, pirates, and ghosts," he judicially repeated. "We might connect up with a few assorted spooks down here. Who knows?"

"What a lark!" Judith declared. "I'd just love to meet a spook, though I'd much rather see a pirate. Maybe I might spot one now!"

Again Judith applied herself to the glasses, as the Vagabond, now at half speed, nosed into the shallow channel. This led among treacherous sand bars and coral reefs toward the rotting and ancient fortress wharf.

Roger Hull glanced at Judith with an eye that fully appreciated all her excellencies. Girls like that—sun-browned, slender, full of health and charm—are they not made to be admired?

As she leaned against the rail, studying the fort, she swayed a little with the slight roll of the yacht upon those ever-summer seas. Her yielding body, and the glint of sunshine in the loose-blown hair about her

cheek; her warm, strong hands that held the binoculars; all her wholesome youthfulness, revealingly modeled in her white yachting costume, slightly confused Hull's senses.

Despite the fact that he looked a singularly cool, collected young man, here beside him stood a phenomenon that for some days had been rather disconcerting to him.

"I say! Of course that's all piffle!" he heard Van Kleek remarking to the banker. "One hears that nonsense about pirate treasures and all that on every island down this way. Buccaneers and—"

"Ah, my dear sir, but there have been buccaneers in this very locality," the professor asserted. "Now, to give names and exact dates, let me recapitulate by—"

And Saltmarsh launched into details, while the Vagabond plowed up the channel. A marvelous toy was this yacht. Just her motor launch alone, on top of her cabin house, would have rejoiced the heart of many a sportsman. Still at a tidy clip, for her half speed was worth the full of many another vessel, she drew steadily in toward the island.

"Never mind the dates, professor," Van Kleek yawned, finishing his highball. "I'm quite willing to take your word for it, old chap!"

"Ah, but we must be exact, before all else," the professor insisted, while his wife, Angelina Saltmarsh, nodded approval. And undeterred, he continued his statistics.

Now the fort was drawing very near. The yacht threw out, on either bow, a creamy wave across shoaling waters of shimmering, evanescent turquoise and jade. Once and again flying fish on diaphanous wings skittered past in their shimmery flight. A clumsy pelican flapped over the bastions of the fortress; and, far aloft, a V-tailed frigate bird hung against the azure.

Suddenly a bell clanged. The yacht's engines stilled their throbbing. Her bow swung a wide arc, and in under the very shadow of that mighty sea castle the Vagabond slid to the long deserted wharf.

Orders echoed from forward, and ropes were uncoiled and whirled through the superheated air. With a creak of hawsers and a groan of canvas fenders, the swift ocean roamer lay resting at Garden Key, strangest and most tragic of islands under Uncle Sam's domain.

"Well, folks, here we are!" old Minot announced the obvious fact. "And it's

only a little past five. Who's going to land?"

"Me!" Judith exclaimed, turning from the rail.

The professor winced. "I!" he corrected. That he had at one time been Judith's private tutor gave him privileges.

"Me, too!" Roger Hull smilingly affirmed. "The *me's* have it over the *I's*, regardless of Webster. Miss Minot, may I have the pleasure of giving you a slant at the dungeons?"

"Dungeons? I love 'em! Oh, I must see the dungeons!"

"My dear child!" the banker remarked flatly. "I wish, Judy, you'd stop being enthused all the time. It's so damned bourgeois!"

But Judith's only answer was a laugh, as, helped by Roger Hull and waiting for no gangplank, she jumped ashore. Van Kleek had no choice save to help the fallow, bob-haired, and angular Beryl to the wharf, leaving the professor and his wife to follow by the gangplank route, with Minot—who was footing all the bills—bringing up as rear guard.

"We'll be layin' here some time, sir?" Captain Matt asked.

"Yes, cap," the banker answered. "Probably stop here to-night, and clear out for Havana in the morning."

"O K, sir!" Matt touched his cap peak.

"Careful, dear!" Mrs. Saltmarsh warned. She resembled a pouter pigeon, and in spite of the intense heat wore a heavy black gown. "You haven't your parasol, and you know the actinic rays down here are extremely destructive."

"Never mind the rays, Angelina," the professor returned. He was a bony wisp of a man in wrinkled seersucker and with a too large straw hat. From around his headgear protruded staring tags of gray hair. He blinked through goggles of colored glass. "I think we can risk the rays for once."

"But do be careful, Alcibiades!" the lady insisted. "This wharf is so excessively ruinous!"

"Are you coming, my love, or are you not?" Saltmarsh demanded with a touch of irritation such as even the best of husbands may feel after more than forty years of connubial bliss.

"I think I will not go, my dear. But please wait until I fetch your parasol!" Whereupon she disappeared below.

The others had meantime tramped off through a ramshackle shed and up the long, badly-decayed wharf, where the heat waves fairly danced. Judith and Roger Hull took the lead, followed by Brent Van Kleek and his unwanted Beryl, while Langdon Minot heavily trailed them.

By the time Professor Saltmarsh had his parasol, Judith and Hull had reached the seventy-foot moat around the fortress, and were pausing to look far down into the clear green waters. Ruinous or not, the wharf and causeway over the moat caused Judith no hesitation.

"What a perfect lark it would be to fall through rotten planks into a real, live moat!"

"Only this is a thoroughly dead one," Hull explained.

"Oh, what's that fish?"

"That," he replied, as a swift, dark streak shot among the corals and seaweed at the bottom, "is a sting ray. It's worse than the well-known actinic ray. You know, one of those pretty underwater birds with a poison stinger in its tail. If they get you right, it's a lily on the chest for yours."

"You don't say?"

"I do say. And the fort authorities used to put sharks in the moat, to keep prisoners from trying to swim across. Bright little idea, eh?"

"My goodness!"

"This fort," the professor lectured, now coming up with his parasol raised, "was once a repository for many desperate offenders. Others, now known to be innocent, were also imprisoned, as for example Dr. Samuel A. Mudd."

"His name was Mudd, all right," Hull declared. "He was ditched with four blow-outs and no spare."

"What for?" Judith asked.

"For setting Wilkes Booth's leg, after Booth shot Lincoln."

"Oh, my!" Judith exclaimed, swinging the camera she carried. "Can we see his dungeon?"

"It's right over the sally port," Hull pointed.

"Let's go right up there!"

"This gets me!" the banker ejaculated, mopping his fat neck. "If you think I'm going to climb stairs, in this infernal heat—"

"Well, we're going to anyhow, dad!" And Judith, slimly energetic, walked on

toward the sally port. Her footsteps and Hull's echoed in that vaulted place with guard rooms and rifle slits on either hand.

Now glimpses became visible of palm trees and jungly thickets that brooded in the cutting sunlight. Silence and mystery enshrouded that deserted stronghold.

As the others entered the sally port, Judith and Hull emerged into the vast open space within the fort. This had once served as a parade ground.

But now all these acres, inclosed by the tremendous hexagonal circuit of the walls, had been nearly reclaimed by jungle, wreckage, and confusion infinite. Buildings and walls showed terrific ravages of time and tempest.

"Come along, this way," Hull bade.

"Judy!" the banker demanded. "Where are you going?"

"Exploring. Want to come?"

"Whew, no! I'll sit down here and wait. You young folks—"

Judith turned to follow Hull. Beryl and Van Kleek came after. The professor had meantime drawn a notebook from his seersucker pocket, and had begun recording data.

The younger foursome strolled along the many arched length of the stupendous casemates. Overhead, brick vaults sustained the immense weight of the fortifications. In the stone floor, rusted arcs showed where long ago old smoothbore cannon had poked their muzzles through innumerable broken embrasures.

Behind all these gun emplacements, square wooden covers—mostly rotted and covered with vines—attracted Judith's eye. She stopped to point.

"What are those?"

"What do we care what they are?" demanded Beryl, crossly. "Let's see your poky old dungeons and get back to the boat. I simply loathe ratty old ruins and things."

"Proving that you still keep that school-girl complex, dear," Judith said sweetly.

"Hanged if you aren't right, Beryl," Van Kleek approved. He had already got a smudge on his white flannel trousers; and he viewed this place—littered with old bricks, broken furniture, cement bags, excelsior, shattered woodwork, and Heaven knows what débris—with high disfavor. "I say, you people, I don't think much of this."

"Well, go back!" Judith said.

"Oh, but old ducky," Beryl acidly laughed, "what would you do then for a chaperon?"

Judith only tilted her lovely chin. She turned to Hull.

"What perfectly mysterious looking covers! What are they?"

Hull, in his rather loose-jointed and deliberate manner, easy and strong, turned one of the covers back.

"Cisterns, see?" he showed her.

"How perfectly priceless!" Beryl mocked. But Judith gave her no heed.

"What a place for pirates to hide their loot!" she remarked, peering far down into those jet-black depths. Then for a moment she fell silent.

The subterranean abyss thus suddenly revealed held something uncanny, awesome. Far below, a sullen and stagnant pool reflected the square opening of the cistern, with the girl's head sharply defined there. It seemed malignantly to beckon, and as if to say menacingly:

"Ah, if ever I got you down here!"

"I say," Van Kleek remarked. "Not much chance for a fellow if he ever got in there! If he fell in—"

"Or was pushed," Hull interrupted. "No, he'd flop into eternity. He'd become considerably extinct."

"Couldn't he get out?" Judith asked.

"I don't see how. These cisterns are mighty deep. Anybody down there couldn't possibly get hold of the opening."

"Corking!" giped Beryl.

"These cisterns go all round the fort," Hull explained. "The soldiers used 'em for drinking water, when there were a thousand or so in the garrison and prisons. Some mighty fine stories, later, about murders here, and all that. Grand place for squaring up accounts with an enemy. Crack on the bean, heave—it'd be all over. Screams for mercy, splashings, gurgles, *tout fini*. Fill in all the details yourself. *Bon soir!*"

"You talk French like a Spanish cow, my dear chap," Van Kleek drawled.

"That's because I once lived in Spain, two years, my dear Alphonse. Also eight months in Matanzas."

"Put the cover on," Judith commanded. "I've been thrilled enough for one while. I can just imagine this mysterious old place is full of pirates and things, right now!"

"If I had your imagination, old darling," Beryl put in, "I'd take gas and have it

out. Well, are we going upstairs and get it over, or aren't we?"

"Right this way," Hull said. "Up these stairs. Easy, now—watch your step!"

"Where does this go?" Judith queried, peeping into a black passageway close beside a gun embrasure that commanded a dazzling view of moat, sand strip, and sea. "I've just got to explore this!"

"Old powder magazine," Hull explained. He struck a match and lighted the way along a tortuous, narrow corridor through solid brickwork. The others followed, with Van Kleek—also lighting matches—as rear guard. Presently they reached a circular room perhaps fifteen feet across, all sheathed with wooden strips converging to a pointed arch above.

"Oo-oo!" Judith cried. "Listen to the echoes!"

"My word!" Van Kleek exclaimed, holding a match flame close to one wall.

"I say, what's this? Bullet! Hanged if somebody hasn't been shooting in here!"

"Shooting?" Beryl asked. "What for?"

"Echoes, probably," Hull suggested.

"That's the way I dope it. But what a whiz of an execution chamber this would make!"

A moment of silence fell. Van's match burned out, and Hull's faded to extinction.

"Light another, quick!" Beryl entreated. "Mamma, I don't like this!"

Hull struck another match, but the head flew off, and the mysterious chamber was plunged in darkness as black as the burial crypt of a great pyramid.

Then suddenly, from somewhere above, came a scrape and thud as of some heavy body falling. And footfalls sounded, dying away to a silence that was horribly oppressive.

"What—was *that*?" gasped Beryl.

"Light a match—quick!"

II

LAUGHING, Hull struck a match.

"Only a little old rat, or something," he suggested. "This place is full of 'em. Or maybe a brick falling. Bricks and beams are always falling in these ruins."

"Rats don't walk like a man," Beryl affirmed. "I heard a man walking up there somewhere."

"Deuced queer!" Van Kleek put in, a bit unsteadily. "But I fancy the professor is exploring the parapet."

"I vote to go back to the boat," Beryl said. "I've had enough thrills for one day."

"Go ahead back, then, if you're scared," Judith bade her. "I'm going to see some more!"

The little party made its way once more out through the tortuous passage to the reassuring light of day.

"I'm not any more scared than you are!" Beryl declared, and led the way up a winding staircase all littered with fallen bricks, mortar, and wood. The others followed. Presently they issued into an upper tier of gun emplacements, which, like those below, extended away on either hand in long, diminishing perspectives of arches.

Still another stairway brought them to the upper works of the fortress. And there, with wonderment at the splendid view now suddenly revealed, they paused in sincere admiration.

From that breezy height, an immense and splendid panorama extended vastly all about them—a solitude where anything at all might happen undiscovered. Ringed by the multicolored Gulf of Mexico, now sparkling as the sun descended through a shining westward haze, they saw a few low-lying keys beyond which infinitudes of sea extended.

Far below, the shimmering moat circled the timeworn walls. A narrow strip of sand diminished to the outer moat wall itself, against which creamed lazy surfs. The yacht appeared a toy, with tiny white-clad sailors on her deck. Aft, Mrs. Saltmarsh was visible, fanning herself while she sat comfortably under the awning.

"Oooooo-oo!" Judith hailed, waving a bare brown arm. "Have you seen the professor up here?"

"No!" the answer drifted back in a moment. "If you see him, be sure he uses his parasol. His poor head is so weak!"

"Must have been a rat we heard," Hull suggested. "If the old chap had been up here, his wife would have got a line on him."

"Well, who cares for rats?" Judith demanded. "Where do we go from here? Let's go over to that flag, there!"

"What flag?" Hull asked. "Oh, that little red rag on a stick?"

They all looked at the little red rag on a stick, which idly fluttered from the southeast bastion.

"That's funny!" Judith exclaimed.

"When we came up the channel, I didn't see *that*! What do you suppose it is?"

"Navigation mark," Van suggested. "Survey mark, or something. I believe the surveying chaps call 'em triangulation marks."

"And just look at those little ships, 'way out there!" Judith cried. "Aren't they pretty?"

"Ships!" Beryl said. "You're talking static. Calling schooners ships!"

"I reckon even fishing schooners might be called ships, one way of looking at it," Hull defended Judith. "Those must be Cubans."

Beneath sandy brows he studied the three or four distant sails that appeared to hang motionless on far, azure expanses. "They're always fishing round here, Cubans and Spaniards. Hard-boiled babies, some of 'em. Rum-runners, smugglers, dope peddlers, and so on. Well—let's go."

The little party proceeded northward along the lofty parapet. A singular place that was, some forty feet wide, between the inner wall that edged the parade ground and the sheer outer drop to the moat. Its grass-grown top was heaped with mounds of earth, among which projected brick chimneys. Huge, dismounted guns sprawled at grotesque angles, their muzzles pointing rustily at the cloudless sky.

"The old boys that built this place weren't so slow," Hull remarked, as he helped Judith over a brick transverse wall. "Stories are, they used slaves. The slaves and workmen died like flies, building this fort nearly a mile round. Yellow fever got 'em."

"My word!" Van muttered. "And what a deuced waste of money!"

"They certainly set Uncle Samuel back some," Hull agreed. "Look at all those buildings."

He pointed at the vast central inclosure, round which extended rows of massive brick barracks. Roofs had caved in, empty rooms gaped where walls had fallen, iron stairways showed; and everywhere lay piles of débris.

"Cyclones and fires finished 'em," Hull said. "And the place has been looted of about everything the fishermen could lug off. Used to be almost the finest fort in America—but just look at the darned thing now!"

"What's that monument down there?" Judith asked, approaching the parapet.

"My word, be careful!" Van Kleek warned. He tried to hold her arm, but she impatiently shook him off.

"Dr. Joseph Smith, the fort surgeon, died here in a big yellow jack epidemic," Hull explained. "That's his tomb. Lots of other graves here, too. And see Bird Key? That little island with the hut in it? They buried 'em by thousands, over there. Even now, in a hurricane, old coffins wash out of the sand and go down the channel."

"How perfectly horrid!" Beryl exclaimed, trying to shudder.

"Buried treasure over there, too?" Judith asked.

"Undoubtedly!" Hull assured her. "What say we go up the lighthouse?"

"But how," Van asked, "about Dr. Mudd's dungeon?"

"Lighthouse first!" Judith decided.

Clambering over grassy hillocks, she made her way toward the iron tower that soared aloft at the northeast angle of the fort. The others tagged, Beryl now and then being helped by Van over some ticklish hazard.

That was no height for the giddy-pated. A single misstep, a slip or slide, might easily have shot one over the parapet to the moat dizzily far below. But all reached the tower safely, and—with Judith leading—tramped up many echoing stairs to the huge, deserted lantern.

A rusty iron balcony surrounded this. From the balcony they could now see the whole enormous extent of the fortifications. Spread out far beneath them as on a map, its gargantuan wreckage shimmered in the heat.

It looked as if some drunken giant in a fit of rage had vented his fury there, with a monstrous ax. Lifeless—or so it seemed—that immense desolation in the impassive sea lay under the tropic sun.

"What's that, 'way over there?" Judith asked, as a crane arose slowly from a far bastion and flapped away.

"That's Loggerhead Key," Hull answered. "Looks pretty from here."

Judith shaded her brown eyes, while a sea breeze wantoned with her hair. Very far to westward they saw Loggerhead, where a black and white lighthouse stood up above massed coconut palms.

"I say!" Van said. "Deuced lonesome place for chaps to live!"

"That's right. There's said to be eighty

million dollars in pirate gold buried over there. French pirates made slaves bury it, then killed 'em so they wouldn't spill the beans."

"Great!" Judith cried. "I can just imagine the Spanish galleons all loaded down with gold and jewels, sailing from Mexico and Peru and Patagonia and every place. And Sir Henry Morgan and Captain Kidd—"

"In long, low, rakish craft," Hull put in. "Don't forget those."

"Yes, yes! Overhauling 'em, or hauling 'em over, whichever it was. Looting 'em, and making the dons walk the plank with all their velvet and laces on!"

"Planked don was a favorite dish, in those days," Hull remarked. He laughed as, with folded arms, freckled and muscular, he leaned his back against the iron tower. Judith glanced at him—cool, sandy haired and quizzical—and smiled as she said:

"You'd have made a pretty fair buccaneer, yourself!"

"Bucket-shop-aneer," Van amended.

"No, buccaneer!" Judith maintained. "Just the kind that let the others have the loot, while he took the wine and women. It's a pity there aren't more men like that to-day!"

"Man wanted!" Beryl exclaimed, shaking her ash-colored bob in disdain. "Pirate preferred!"

"That's all right!" Judith flashed back at her. "You people are too disgustingly nice and civilized. I only wish I'd lived in the good old swashpickling days, or whatever they were!"

"Now just suppose for a moment I was a pirate?" Roger Hull quizzed her. "I've got a nice, piratical name, anyhow. Hull, that suggests a ship. And Roger—Jolly Roger—that's the fine old skull and crossbones flag, you know. What if I was a twentieth century, high-powered pirate, hitting on all six? What then?"

"Oh, but you're not," she sighed. "The pirates are all gone, now—all but the bankers and the Wall Street gang. I know they've called dad, poor old 'Tiger' Minot, a pirate times enough. But I mean the regular kind—with red bananas round their heads, and—"

"Bandannas, my dear," Beryl corrected.

"Yes, fiery red! And cutlasses between their teeth, and everything, swarming over the rail. I'd have been so terribly thrilled!"

"My word!" Van said. "But it's not done, you know! I propose to go back to the yacht for dinner. We've hardly time to dress, as it is."

"I second that," Beryl agreed. "Judy and her pirates make me tired. She's got spiders on her ceiling, that's what!"

Turning, Beryl entered the tower and started down. The others followed. At the bottom, once more out on the parapet, Hull pointed westward.

"We can go down another stairway at the next bastion," he suggested. "That'll save a lot of scrambling over these earth mounds. Then across the parade ground to the sally port. It'll be no end easier."

"Yes," asked Judith; "but how about Dr. Mudd's dungeon?"

"Oh, hang the defunct Dr. Mudd!" Beryl ejaculated.

"They almost did," Hull said, "at that!"

"I mean," Beryl insisted, "*I'm* not going dungeon hunting, anyhow! My nerves are all frazzled to a frizzle, as it is—with pirates and all that apple sauce. As if there were pirates nowadays, and—hello, what's *that*?"

"Sounded to me like somebody trying to holler, and being made to shut up mighty sudden!" Judith replied, listening acutely.

"Where?" Van Kleek demanded. "My word, where?"

"Down there somewhere on the parade ground," Beryl affirmed. "Didn't you hear it, Mr. Hull?"

"Might have been somebody shouting from the yacht," Hull suggested. "Or Mr. Minot calling us."

"Dad! Dad! Oh, dad!" Judith hailed, through cupped palms. "Where are you?"

No answer. Van Kleek laughed.

"Oh, I say, you're hearing things that aren't!" he jeered. "You'll be seeing the invisible, next. Spooks, or pirates, or any old thing, you know!"

"Come along, let's be toddling!" Roger Hull said, in a voice that somehow had subtly altered. "I reckon we've seen about all there is to see up here."

Over the infinite confusions of the parapet they clambered toward the bastion.

"We haven't made a picture up here yet," Judith complained. "This would be a corking place for a group."

"Sun's too low, now," Hull negatived the plan. "I vote for the yacht, and dinner, *pronto*!"

As they made their way along, slow-heaving swells far below them broke idly against the outer moat wall, and with dull rumble trundled back seaward again. To north of them, no speck blemished the infinite expanse of sea, from which the sinking sun reflected a dull coppery patina of light. They seemed all alone in the world, as if marooned on Robinson Crusoe's isle itself.

Suddenly Hull, who was in the lead, stopped short. He stood a minute, peering, then turned and came back toward Judith.

"I think we'd better go back, after all," he said in rather an odd voice. "As I remember now, the stairway ahead isn't passable. It's all filled up with rubbish."

"What makes you look so queer?" Judith demanded. "You look as if you'd seen a ghost, or something!"

"Not a thing in the world, my dear Miss Minot," he assured her. "It's only that the stairway—"

A quavering scream from Beryl interrupted him.

"Look, look!" she cried. "My God—what's *that*?"

"Where?" Judith exclaimed. Then she, too, gave a cry of startlement.

"Oh, damn!" Hull ejaculated. "Didn't I tell you to go back?"

"My word, I say!" Van Kleek began.

"You mustn't order us about like that, old chap. It isn't done, and—"

But Van did not finish. His blinking eyes focused on an astonishing object there right ahead of them. He stammered and went pale.

"Go on back, all of you!" Hull angrily commanded. "I'm in charge of this party. Back, out of here!"

"It—it's a hand!" Beryl gasped. "It's sticking up out of the ground at us. It—it's—a *hand*!"

III

CONFUSION assailed them, all but Roger Hull.

"All right, *all* right, it's a hand," he admitted. "Anybody can see that, without bifocals. But is there anything in a hand to throw kitten fits over? Here, you, Miss Chatfield—snap out of it. No fainting, now!"

"Oh—oh—but where's the rest of him?" "I positively shall!"

"Hang it, I say you mustn't!" Van pro-

tested, shaking her rather ungallantly as she tried to lean against him. "What's a hand, more or less, between friends?"

"Don't be such a mutt!" Judith commanded. "I guess you're not so tender you'll tear under the wing!"

"Oh, oh, but where's the rest of him?" Beryl stammered. "And—and how did he get there and—why?"

"Buried. Dead. That answers all three questions," Hull said, tersely. "Dead as Job's turkey." He kicked the raw, loose earth of what was obviously a fresh made grave, with a prospecting toe. "Either the undertaker—whoever he was—undertook more of an undertaking than he was up to, or else there's been a rain these past few days that's washed this bird's claw out. Nothing to it, anyhow."

"Nothing to it?" Beryl quavered. "Why—it—oh, I'm fainting right now! Catch me, somebody!"

"Let go of her, Van Kleek!" Hull commanded. "If she falls, let her fall hard—on those old bricks. There, I thought that would fix her! A dead man's nothing. One more or less doesn't matter. Men are three for a nickel down this way!"

"I suppose so," Judith admitted, "though I've seen lots nicer things than this hand."

"Kind of thrilling, though, isn't it?" Hull demanded.

"Ye-e-es, but—"

"And you so dead anxious to walk planks, and wade through pirate gore!"

"Oh, but this is different, and you're a brute! And, besides, it's so unexpected. Wonder who the poor thing is—or was?"

"Cuban fisherman, probably." Hull spoke lightly, but his shrewd gray eyes were anxious. "Those ducks often put in here, to seine bait, get wood for repairs, steal metal and so on. And sometimes rough weather drives 'em in. They're always cashing in, on their trips. This is a Cuban, all right."

"But, I say, it's a deuced odd place to bury a chap, on the battlements," Van said. "They might have chucked the blighter down a cistern, or planted him on the parade ground."

"No, they wouldn't have done that," Hull explained, although somehow his voice lacked conviction. "They're great sticklers on really planting people, Cubans are. They wouldn't fall for the cistern idea, at all. And if they'd planted him on

the parade, it would have been bound to attract attention."

"Not as much as here!" Judith said.

"Oh, lots more. I mean, this is still government property. There's a coast guard boat runs out from Key West, once in a dog's age. The Cubans are in wrong, anyhow, stealing lead and things here. If they started a cemetery, too, Uncle Sam would close down on 'em, hard; keep a guard here, and so on."

"My word, but there couldn't be a more conspicuous place than this!" Van protested, while the girls looked with more equanimity at the hand. They both—especially Judith—appeared fast recovering from their shock.

And the hand indubitably was fascinating. A brown, square-fingered hand it was, strong corded, calloused. Somehow, although this was of course mere fantasy, it seemed beckoning them with sinister invitation.

"Conspicuous, did you say?" Hull asked. "No, sir! Under ordinary circumstances, nobody might blow along here from one year's end to the other. Not in a month of Sundays!"

"My goodness gracious, I wish we hadn't come!" Beryl put in. "Oh, my poor nerves! I'll never be the same after this, never. Let's go!"

"Fine," Hull agreed. "I think we had better be doing a bit of a retreat."

"And, my word, a little bit of a drink all around," Van said, "wouldn't do us any positive harm."

Leaving the ominous hand still beckoning, as it appeared, they pushed on westward along the parapet. Silent now, void of banter and laughing, they passed the rough-grassed mounds and the dismantled ordnance, and presently reached another bastion.

Down this, by a winding stair of finely cut granite littered like the one whereby they had ascended, they made their retreat. Stopping not in the upper tier of gun emplacements, they continued down a second stairway, and thus reached the lower tier.

As they issued out among the infinite ruin that bestrewed the parade ground—heaps of stone and brick, roof timbers, metal work, all tumbled like a game of mammoth jackstraws—Judith hailed again:

"Dad, oh, dad! Where are you?"

Only hollow echoes answered. A silence profound and ominous brooded over the immense inclosure.

"They must have gone back to the boat already, dad and the professor," said Judith. "Well, we'll be there in five minutes, now."

"Oh, goodness! Look at that rat!" Beryl cried, as a beady-eyed, gray-whiskered rodent scuttled from the jungle and ran to cover. "Oh, I wish we were on board!"

"Follow me," Hull directed.

He led the party by a winding path among bushes that led close beside Dr. Smith's monument. In a small clearing they saw a carpenter's bench, rudely built, with fresh shavings on the ground.

"I say, somebody's been at work here," Van commented. "My word, I wonder who the chap was, and just what he was up to?"

Oppressed by a formless and perhaps unreasoning anxiety, they pressed onward to the sally port. That port, the only exit from the fortress, was only a hundred feet away.

And now it was close at hand. Another moment would have brought them to it, through it, and so upon the causeway leading to the rotted wharf. But suddenly Hull stopped short.

"Hello?" he queried, peering at something that for the instant the others did not see. "Hello! Who the devil are you?"

"*Buenos días, señor,*" a voice answered. "Up the hands!"

And now all saw the unkempt figure that, standing in the casemate just at the left of the sally port, was leveling a large and highly unpleasant looking Luger at Hull's anatomy.

Without delay, Hull obeyed. Few prudent men will hesitate when a foreign gentleman of such appearance makes a request of this character. Therefore, Hull's hands shot aloft.

"All of you!" the foreign gentleman added, in a moderate voice that, however, held dangerous overtones. His accent was obviously Cuban, Hull noticed. "All, *pronto!*"

Beryl uttered a faint scream, which died to a wholly absurd squeak as her knuckled hands reached for the air. Judith gasped, and imitated a double-barreled strap hanger. Van Kleek had already attempted to unhook the sky.

"*Que hay?*" Hull demanded, whose two years in Spain had left him lots of Spanish. "What's the big little old idea?"

"Never mind," the foreign gentleman replied. They saw he appeared to be smiling most unpleasantly; but in reality it was a scar, not a smile, that drew up the right corner of his mouth. This scar, livid across his cheek bone, ended at a vacant eye socket. "Do as I command, nothing shall happen you. Disobey, and I advise you I am much quick to the trigger."

"Dad! Oh, dad!" Judith called in agonized tones.

"Not dead yet, *señorita,*" the Cuban explained. "No one is not dead yet. But—"

"She didn't say dead, she said dad!" Hull interrupted.

Van Kleek chattered: "My word—I say, you fellow—"

"And what is dad?" the Cuban queried.

"Dad means father. Where is he? The old boy with the white clothes—big Panama hat—seen him?"

The Cuban laughed.

"Ah, yes, yes. He is near to here. You shall see dad much soon, *señorita.* But—"

"You haven't killed my father, have you?" Judith demanded. "You—you villain, you!"

"Ah, no, no. But nobody—ah—never know what may happen. But it is not time now for the talk. Come here, you!" He beckoned Hull. "Queeck!"

"We obviously cannot indulge in argument," Hull said to his companions as he stepped forward, hands still aloft. "We're all wet, and that's a fact."

"I say, this won't do at all," Van protested. "This sort of thing positively isn't done to people like us!"

"So I see," Hull smiled. "Well, what now?" he asked the Cuban. "Pocketbook is in my inside coat pocket—aboard the yacht. Sorry I'm in shirt sleeves, old boy. Haven't got my watch on, either. But if you want my ring—"

"*Que va!* It is not the small trifles I ask. I have—how you say?—stronger fish to fry. You shall see, *señor!*"

The Cuban whistled twice. Another figure, bearing stout fish net twine, issued from the casemate. An ill-favored figure this was, barefoot like the first, but with a more ragged jacket, and wearing trousers patched with particolored cloths.

"Bind this one, too," the one-eyed man ordered, in Spanish—which Hull, alone of

all the party, understood. "And bind them all!"

At this command, Ragged Jacket drew Hull's arms down behind his back and swiftly tied his wrists. The net cord, pulled good and tight, cut into Hull's hard muscles, but he only grinned.

"Make a good job of it, *compañero*," he advised in passable Castilian, "or I warn you, you may regret it!"

"Hanged if I knew you could speak Spanish so well," Van Kleek put in. "Deuced handy, my word! Find out what these fellows mean to do with us, and stop 'em—that's a good chap!"

Van was left in no uncertainty as to what they meant to do with him, at least; for under One Eye's watchful direction, backed by the Luger, Ragged Jacket very deftly and forcibly tied his hands also. Van winced.

"I say!" he protested. "You chaps will smart for this! I shall protest to the government! I shall insist—"

"Now the *señoritas*!" One Eye commanded.

"Wait!" Hull cried. "This is going too far. You can tie us men, but hands off the women!"

"As a Cuban, I appreciate your *corresta*," One Eye returned. "But, however, the *señoritas* must to be tied." And he bade Ragged Jacket proceed at once.

"Goodness gracious, are they going to tie me?" Beryl gasped. "Oh, I shall die—I positively shall!"

"Don't be such a baby!" Judith exclaimed. "People don't die from having their hands tied. Here!" and she put hers behind her. "Here you are, Mr. Rags. I'm ready!"

Mr. Rags proceeded to bind her, no more gently than he had done the men. Judith set teeth on her full lower lip, as the cords cut, but kept silence. Beryl, however, at the hurt of their pressure, moaned:

"I'm going to faint, Judy. I—I'm fainting, right now!"

"If you do, you'll be dragged," Judith grimly answered. "Dragged, probably by the hair—if you've got enough to be dragged by. Better buck up, old thing, and walk. Now where do we go from here?"

One Eye jerked a thumb toward the casemate.

"This way!" he ordered.

Herded by Mr. Rags, all four captives

entered the casemate. One Eye preceded them, shuffled to an iron-barred door that stood open, and bowed.

"After you," he announced.

"But, my good fellow," Van protested, "you—you aren't going to put us in a dungeon? I say!"

"After you, *señor*!"

"Don't argue!" Hull said. "If he says after him, that means after him. Stop shadow boxing and take the gaff!"

They entered the cell, hot, stifling, and obscure.

"Everything's coming your way, Judy," Van tried to jest, although his tones shook. "You wanted to see a dungeon, and my word! here you are. You wanted to see a real live pirate, and—"

But Judith gave no heed. For now, from a dark corner sounded a voice—the voice of Langdon Minot.

"My God! Judy? You?"

"Dad!"

"They haven't hurt you, have they?"

"Where are you, dad?"

"Right here, Judy, where these damned Spigs put me—*me*, Langdon Minot! If I ever get out of here, oh, what I won't do to them!"

"Is there a magician present among us?" Hull asked. "If so, his services are greatly in demand."

"You're not killed, dad?" the girl exclaimed, as her eyes now caught the vague outlines of her father fatly crouching in a dark recess. "You're not murdered?"

"Not appreciably, Judy. Only so mad that the steam's coming out of my ears. And with my blood pressure what it is, I'm liable to bust any minute!"

"Don't bust, just yet!" she entreated, going to him and falling on her knees amid the litter and dust of the brick floor. "You positively mustn't bust, dad—not here!"

"Hello, professor!" Hull exclaimed. "So you're in the hoosegow, too? How's your temperature?"

"Fairly normal," the professor answered, from another corner. His goggles faintly gleamed in the obscurity, but his parasol was nowhere visible. "Pulse probably eighty-five, respiration somewhat more than twenty. A little accelerated, but reasonably correct. Some pain, from the cords about my wrists, and—"

"They gathered you both in, together, the pirates did?"

"Consecutively, while Mr. Minot was

dozing, and I was observing an unusually fine specimen of *baccharis glomerulifera*. If I could only notify Mrs. Saltmarsh—"

"She'll know all about it before long," Hull predicted. "And so 'll all hands. Well—"

"Silence!" One Eye commanded, gun in hand, while Mr. Rags stood by for further orders. "You listen me, all six Americanos, while I espeak!"

"We're listening," Hull said. "Shoot!"

"No, no, don't shoot!" Beryl gasped. "If you start shooting, I'll positively—"

"Hold on!" Hull commanded. "This gentleman has something to spill, and we'd better be good. If we aren't, we're liable to be planted with the charming stranger up there on the parapet."

"Ah, so you find that, *señor*?" One Eye smiled. His smile consisted in lengthening his scar a trifle. "Correct. He refuse to listen to reason, that *señor*. Most unreasonable! He escape his cell. He got up there, wave his coat for signal to a schooner. So he died. We bury him where he fall. It is our custom. Always where they fall. But not deep enough, that one. So the rain—"

"A washout," Hull put in. "I thought so. Do a better job next time, *amigo*. Well, what's wanted? *Dinero*?"

"What else?" One Eye nodded. His face, by the vague light of a single slit in the immensely thick wall, grew almost affable. But the Lüger negated that expression. "You make the guess correct, immediately."

"Money?" Minot exploded. "Get up off your knees, Judy! I won't have you down in this dirt! Money? By—whew! Where the Gehenna am I going to get money? What d'you think my yacht is, a floating bank? And even if it was, d'you think I'd stand for a holdup like this?"

"Go into low," Hull cautioned, while Beryl walked to Judith—who had now arisen—leaned against her, and wept. "Easy, Mr. Minot. We're caught with the hook right through our gills, all of us. You've hooked a few competitors yourself, before now, so you know the game. The only question before the house is—how much does the gentleman want, and how quick can we give it to him?"

"You mean to surrender?" the banker panted, struggling to his feet; by no means easy for a man of his build, with both hands tied behind his back. The professor mean-

time continued to sit in his corner, estimating his pulse and respiration, and pondering on Angelina. "Surrender to this—this—"

"Right-o!"

"I'm ashamed of such cowardice in an American!"

"My word, it is amazing!" Van Kleeck chipped in.

"Correct," Hull agreed. "But we've recently seen an entirely extinct individual that tried to buck the game. What, after all, is a little money? Give me liberty, or give me—I mean, we've got to talk cold turkey, right off the ice."

"Hanged if that isn't the deuced fact, after all," Van agreed.

"With me paying for it all, as usual?" the banker puffed.

"We'll kick in our pro rata shares when we get back home," Hull said. "But let's not waste any time juggling details."

"How much," he demanded, turning to One Eye; "how much does the *señor* want?"

"Ah, that," One Eye remarked, "is the grand question! But it is not for me to say."

"Who, then?"

"It is for my *jefe*—chief, you call it?"

"Chief!" exclaimed the banker. "What chief? Who the devil?"

"Don Tiburón, *señor*."

"Tiburón?" the professor put in. "Why, bless my soul, that means a shark, in Spanish!"

"Shark?" Beryl cried. "Oh, they aren't going to throw us to the sharks, are they? If they do, I'll positively collapse; I know I shall!"

"Don Tiburón," One Eye repeated. "It is for him to say."

"That so?" Hull asked. "And where is this interesting pirate?"

"He arrives, even now," One Eye informed them, while Van Kleeck groaned:

"Now, are you satisfied, Judy? Pirates, my word!"

"He arrives at the hour," One Eye affirmed. "He have seen our signal flag. He comes. He will say the price."

"Flag!" Hull exclaimed. "Ah-ha, the plot thickens! Nice little old red rag on a stick. I smell a mice. Well, Miss Minot, reckon you're going to see a real, live buccaneer before long."

"Well, you can make fun all you want to!" Judith retorted. "But we'll be get-

ting our money's worth, anyhow. None of my friends ever saw one! Where is he?"

"Don Tiburón, he approach," One Eye informed her. "His *goeletta*—what you call schooner—she is almost here."

"By Jove!" Van exclaimed. "One of the schooners we saw in the offing, or whatever it is! Oh, I say! But when he tackles those sailor chaps on the yacht—"

"My Angelina!" the professor ejaculated. "In danger of attack, and I am helpless! I must go to her. *Señor*, let me go to my wife. She has a weak heart. I demand it!"

"*Bueno!*" One Eye consented. "You can go. But only as a messenger. Tell the captain there must be no resistings when our schooner she arrive. There must be none, to us here in the fort. Not any attemptings of the rescue. If there is; if there is any shootings fired off—"

"What then?" the banker demanded.

"We have the ways of to make obeying,"

One Eye smiled, slightly wagging his gun.

"Hot canine!" Hull exclaimed. "The good old hostage business!"

"Exactly as in many historical episodes," the professor stated. "As for example, the siege of—"

"Ring off!" Hull directed. "Professor, get ready to travel."

"Hostages!" Judith cried. "How perfectly thrilling! I'm a hostage. You're a hostage, dad. Oh, I never thought I'd be a hostage. Isn't it—"

"Judy, do shut up!" the banker commanded. "If these unwashed Spigs think—"

"They do, sometimes," Hull said. "But, what's more to the point, they act. Professor, get busy. Tell Captain Herriland if there's any resistance, we're all up the flue. Got it?"

"Yes, yes," Saltmarsh affirmed, getting up. "But you"—and he appealed to One Eye, while Mr. Rags shuffled bare feet—"you would not murder an excellent wife with a weak heart, like my Angelina? Would you, now?"

"We murder nobody, *señor!*" One Eye retorted. "We follow the rules of the profession. The captives, we allow them the grand privilege to buy the liberty. The brave Americanos, they value the liberty above all. Even above the so precious dollars, *no es verdad?*"

"Damn few dollars you'll get from me!" Minot fumed.

"Ah, who know?" One Eye questioned. "When one millionaire he behold his daughter being stealed, he maybe change his mind. The dollars, what you say? I should to worry. The money is sure to arrive. Also Don Tiburón. *Señor* Professor, you go?"

"Yes, yes, indeed! Anything, so that I can reach my Angelina's side and protect her!"

"Listen me, then," One Eye directed. "The wireless, she must be break. If any dispatch is send, the prisoners die."

"You're going to bust my wireless?" Minot demanded. "Of all the infernal—"

"Hold on!" Hull ordered. "What else, *señor?*"

"And the yacht," One Eye added, "she surrender to Don Tiburón, complete. That is all. Now the professor can go."

One Eye spoke a few words in Spanish to Mr. Rags, whose other name was Pablo. This worthy drew a knife and cut the professor's bonds.

"Am I to return?" Saltmarsh asked. "Return here?"

"Of course you are, you thundering old fool!" the banker cried. "What d'you think? You're going to live in luxury aboard the yacht, while we're cooped up here in this sweltering dungeon like rats in a trap?"

"Then," the professor announced with an air of finality—"then I shall bring Angelina back here with me."

"Help!" Judith exclaimed. "Let him stay aboard, please, dad!"

"Well—h-m—in that case, all right. You can stay, professor."

"As he likes," One Eye said. "But make the captain to very much understand if there is any attemptings to make a rescue—"

"We all kick the bucket?" Hull put in.

"Bucket?" One Eye queried. "Bucket? What is bucket?"

"I mean, we all go up the flue, cash in, croak, go west, kick off."

"I understand nothing, *señor*. Is this the Inglis you espeak?"

"No, damn you, United States!" Minot roared. "And the good old U. S. A. will blow you half-baked pirates clean off the map before we're through. You and your whole damned island!"

"We accept your terms," Hull said. "We will obey, completely. Otherwise we d-i-e, die. Get it?"

"Ah, so! Exactly, yes. Die. Now, Señor Professor, if you have the goodness for to go—"

IV

"WHERE in the world is your parasol, Alcibiades?" Mrs. Saltmarsh demanded, as the professor shambled down the wharf to the gangplank. He looked pale and distraught under the still heated beams of the descending sun, and now and then he rubbed his cord-lamed wrists.

But Angelina, knitting a muffler on the after deck, was thinking only of his head. "Have you gone and left that parasol somewhere again, my love? When you know the actinic rays—"

"Let us not speak of actinic rays, just now," the professor interrupted, coming aboard. "Other and more weighty matters now occupy my mind. The fact is, my love, we are all prisoners."

"There, I was positive the sun would turn your brain, my dear!" She fixed a reproachful gaze on him. "If you would only listen to me— Go downstairs, Alcibiades. I shall have you lie down, at once, and place an ice bag on your head."

"Ice bag be—h-m!—be hanged, my love!" he exclaimed. "Do you, or do you not, observe that two-masted schooner already approaching?" He made a tragic gesture at a fishing vessel that, trailing a dinghy, was now working easily up the channel under a light slant of breeze. "Do you, or do you not, observe it? I demand a categorical reply!"

"I observe it," the lady admitted, glancing over her steel-rimmed spectacles. "And what then?"

"That, my love, is a pirate vessel, and all who went ashore are now lying bound in a dungeon, as hostages. I am an emissary from a one-eyed buccaneer, regarding terms of surrender and ransom. We are all in peril of violent death. And yet, my Angelina, you talk to me of ice bags!"

"Alcibiades, my poor dear," the lady somewhat severely remarked, "go downstairs at once. You shall also have an ice bath, be put to bed, and have aromatic spirits of ammonia administered every twenty minutes. If that does not suffice—"

"Angelina, my love," he returned with some asperity, "you have always proved an excellent wife. Most excellent! But you have occasionally failed to comprehend me fully. This is one of those occasions,

and a most critical one!" The professor's Adam's apple bobbed with agitation. "Desist, I pray, from talk of ice and aromatic spirits. Such remarks are entirely futile. I must see Captain Herriland at once!"

And leaving her blinking with trepidation, he walked away forward to the captain's cabin, just abaft the wheelhouse.

He found Herriland stretched out in his bunk, luxuriating in stocking feet and the perusal of Burdwood's "Azimuth Tables."

"Well, prof?" the mariner demanded.

"Captain, I have some exceedingly important—and painful—news for you."

"Have, eh? Found some new kind of bug that ain't what it ought to be?"

"No, captain. We have been captured by pirates."

"Yes, yes, sure! Well—nemmind, prof. Just go take a nap, and—"

"You think me jesting, captain. My excellent wife considers that I have suffered a sunstroke. Not so!" The professor stretched out his wrists. "Observe, captain. These ridges—made by the pirates' cords."

"What?"

"An incontrovertible fact, captain. At this exact moment, Mr. and Miss Minot, Mr. Hull, and Mr. Van Kleek are similarly incarcerated in one of the fortress dungeons, with two pirates standing guard over them. So is Miss Beryl Chatfield."

"Quit kidding me, professor!"

"I am not—as you infer—jesting. There are matters of life and death at stake. See that schooner approaching?" The professor gestured at the channel, visible through the captain's port window. "That schooner is the pirate chief's vessel."

"I see! Coming to cut all our throats. Well, just have a bit of a—"

"Damn it!" the professor suddenly exploded, with the first oath he had uttered in eleven years. "Are you unable to comprehend? Go ashore, yourself, and ascertain the truth! No, no, you must not do that. Bless my soul, what shall I do? If you went, the hostages would all be shot at once!"

Herriland reared up on one elbow and bent wrinkled brows at the professor, who now, in his excitement, was blowing out his cheeks.

"Listen, captain!" the distressed pedant pleaded. "You must dismantle your radio, send no message, and make no attempt at rescue. Such may be fatal to all hands!"

"By gumbo!" Herriland exclaimed. "If I thought there was any truth in this—"

"What then?"

"Why, hell's bells! I'd take our signal cannon, load her to the muzzle with kentledge, and sink that Spig as she goes!"

"For Heaven's sake, no! You would sacrifice five helpless human beings! Desist, I beg you!"

"Well—allowing you aren't sunstruck or crazy—what shall I do, then?" The captain now was on his feet, scratching a tousled poll. "I can take half a dozen husky seamen, arm 'em with pistols and sporting rifles, and stage a rescue."

"No, captain! That would mean only a slaughter of the hostages, and—"

"For the land's sake, Alcibiades!" Angelina's voice sounded at the cabin door. "Are you still talking pirates? You must go right downstairs and—"

"Cease, Angelina! This is no time for—"

"*You* better go below, ma'am," the captain advised.

"My husband will suffer a complete collapse!"

"We all may, ma'am, if what he says is true, as by the jumping jingo it may be! Go below yourself!"

"Yes, yes, my love," the professor chimed in. "Should any bombardment begin, as at the battle of Lepanto, in fifteen hundred and seventy-one, you must not be in range. Go downstairs at once and await my coming."

As she still resisted, they both bundled her protestingly to the companionway, down to her cabin, and locked her in.

The two-masted schooner meantime, with patched canvas idly drawing, had worked into the nearer channel. Now, at a word from a slim figure at the wheel, her sails slacked, folded, and collapsed. Her chain rattled, and the Cuban triangle-and-bars flag drooping, she rode to her hook, as peaceful appearing a craft as ever floated.

"That doesn't look like a pirate!" Captain Herriland remarked in guarded tones, at the rail, lest the white-clad A. B.'s lounging about forward might overhear. "If that isn't just an ornery Cuban fisherman, I'll eat my hat."

"Appearances are deceitful, captain," the agitated professor returned. "Ah, see now? We are to be boarded at once!"

This became immediately obvious. Without delay, the slim steersman descended into the dinghy, and with him a couple of rag-tag fellows. They gave way toward the Vagabond.

"By God, we can't let them cutthroats come aboard us—if they *are* cutthroats!" the captain exclaimed. "Wait till I get my gun!"

"Pray, desist!" Saltmarsh begged. "Any violence will be fatal to all our people ashore!"

"That's all right, but I'm not going to take chances on my own life, without being heeled!"

Herriland fetched his revolver, and stowed it in his hip pocket. From below sounded a muffled banging—Mrs. Saltmarsh's ineffective efforts to release herself and her ice bag from durance vile.

By this time Johansen, the mate, had joined the captain, and the dinghy was close abeam.

"Ahoy, there!" Herriland shouted. "What's wanted?"

"Pray be courteous," the professor murmured, blinking through his colored goggles. "Do not jeopardize the lives of—"

"Coming aboard!" the slim man answered, in the stern sheets. "I desire to see the captain."

The slim man's English was nearly perfect, although with a Spanish accent.

"Cap'n? That's me," Herriland announced. "State your business!"

"Ah, that will wait," the slim man smiled, under a black mustache. "Merely a little friendly call."

"By Godfrey, this may be bad!" Herriland muttered to Johansen, who nodded. "Wish I dared open fire and chase the Spig off!"

"For Heaven's sake, no!" the professor entreated, in a very agony of terror. "Diplomacy, captain—diplomacy!"

"That be damned!" Herriland retorted.

"Leave dem coom, cap'n," Johansen advised. "Any one off us can lick dat whole crew!"

The dinghy was now alongside, pulled by her two disreputables. With these the slim man formed a marked contrast. Not that his soiled white-cotton clothes were of much better quality than theirs; but that his face, his bearing, were wholly different. Then, too, he wore socks and shoes.

"You have not the accommodation ladder?" he queried.

"Sure we have, admiral," Herriland mocked. "But we aren't putting it down to-day for anybody but President Coolidge himself."

The slim man gave a curt order in Spanish, and the dinghy moved ahead to the wharf. It held there.

The slim man with great agility clambered up crosspieces spiked to a pile, reached the level of the Vagabond's rail, and stepped aboard. Facing Herriland, the professor, and Johansen, he began:

"I know who you are. I know what this yacht is. It is my business to keep informed of many things. But you—ah, you do not know me. Allow me the pleasure, señores, to introduce myself—Don Tiburón!"

"Yeh?" the captain grunted truculently. "And what then?"

"My name, I see it means little to you," the slim man smiled. They saw his teeth were good, his dark eyes smoldering in the level-slanting sun. He stroked his mustache. "It means little to you, my name? Yes?"

"Not a damn thing in the world," Captain Matt agreed. "And if you reckon I'm going to say I'm glad to know you, you're expecting me to lie, which I won't for any Cuban whatever!"

"*No importa!*" the don returned. "Though kindly observe, I am not Cuban, but Spanish. It matter nothing. Few people are glad to know me, or see me. I am use to that. Shall we maybe go in your cabin, capitan, for a few words?"

"I calculate you can say anything you got to say right here."

"Ah, no, no!" Don Tiburón glanced forward. Some of the sailors were listening, as was Sukui, the Jap steward. And from the engine room hatchway old Hammerslow, the engineer, was looking. "This is very important. I much better prefer the privacy."

"Give him his way, captain," the professor put in. "I strongly urge it! You must!"

"Correct, he must," Don Tiburón insisted, with a glance at Saltmarsh. "We have an Spanish proverb that the man who wash a donkey's head waste his time and soap. So, the man who oppose me waste maybe even his life."

"You hate yourself, don't you?" Herriland growled. "But, anyhow, come along and get it over with!"

In silence now, the captain led the way cabinward. Don Tiburón followed, and after him the professor and Johansen. Once inside the cabin, Don Tiburón held out his slim, olive-hued hand.

"Your gun, señor!"

"What gun?" the captain retorted.

"The gun in your hip pocket. I have see its outline very plain, of course. You might forget yourself. If you did—ah, what a catastrophe to so many innocent ones! Give me the gun."

"Well, by God, you *are* a cool one, to come aboard the yacht I command and disarm me!"

"Cool, ah, yes. That is all my line of profession. Let me at once impress you one idea, capitan. You are powerless. You lay in my hand, like the gun you have just gave me, for which *muchas gracias!*" Don Tiburón pocketed the weapon.

"Is dat so?" the mate exclaimed. "If I was you, cap'n, I never gave dat gun oop!"

"He must," the don smiled. "What I order, you all obey. At once, and make no questions!"

"And what if we don't?" Captain Matt demanded.

"Ah, how regrettable for the owner of this very handsome yacht! For his daughter and his guests—and you also, and the crew!"

"You've got a nerve!" the captain growled. "Throwing that bluff, when there's liable to be a coast guard boat down here any time!"

"No, not any time, capitan. She is not arrive, now, in three weeks more. I am inform, quite fully. But come," the Spaniard added, "we shall not, as you say in Inglis, beat around the bush. We shall get at once to the business. That is not the Spanish custom, to make haste. Haste is only the passion of fools, as we say, but time presses. And first, you must give to me all the arms and ammunition on board—to avoid accident."

"Like hell we will!"

"Like hell or any way you please, capitan, but give them, and at once!" The don spoke silkily. "At once, you understand?"

"What guns? We haven't got—"

"Ah, pardon! I know all. You have several revolvers, two sporting rifles and shotguns, and one small cannon for the saluting. Give them all to me!"

"I'll see you fried first!"

"But, captain, you must obey!" the professor cried, horribly distressed. "If you refuse, it will mean the death of all our people in the fort! Can you not—I most urgently exhort you to make the attempt!—can you not comprehend the situation?"

Captain Herriland nodded.

"They've got us, these dirty Spigs have," he admitted. "Well, I guess we got to crawl down, like Davy Crockett's coon. Come on, Mr. Johansen, let's get to it!"

They issued onto the deck, and Captain Herriland spoke his little piece like a man. His face was grim and drawn as he faced his crew.

"Boys, we're held up," he explained. "Stuck up. Highjacked, you might say. These half-breeds here have got the drop on us. Some of 'em are holding Mr. Minot and the rest of the shore party, up in the fort. It means they'll be shot if we don't knuckle under. We got to give these pups all our shooting irons of every kind. I'll hand over the small arms. You get the saluting cannon up—and look alive!"

Astonished, angry, muttering, but helpless to rebel, the men obeyed. In five minutes the brass cannon was gleaming in the level sun.

"Very good," Don Tiburón smiled. "Now, lower it into my small boat."

This, too, they did, their rage and hate accentuated by the unexpected sight of grinning Cuban faces along the schooner's rail. The two rag tags in the dinghy received the cannon, as well as all the Vagabond's other armament.

"So far it is so good," the don approved. "Now, capitan, the wireless is next. I shall speak to your operator."

Captain Herriland summoned "Sparks," a trim, defiant-looking young chap named Elwood.

"You will at once dismantle your apparatus," the Spaniard announced, "and throw it overboard."

"Is zat so?" Elwood retorted. "Cap'n Herriland, have I got to mind this wop?"

"Yes. He's got us jammed on a lee shore. Do as he says."

"But to ruin thousands of dollars' worth of apparatus? I could disconnect it, and—"

"Yes," the Don remarked softly, "and then repair it secretly and send messages. No, that will not do. We have an Spanish

proverb that the horse wants one thing, and the rider wants another. I am now the rider. The apparatus must go overboard, immediately!"

A quarter hour from then, with the whole crew boiling and ready—disarmed as they were—to attack the Cubans with knives, fists, anything at all, the Vagabond's wireless had splashed and sunk to the coral bottom.

"Bueno!" Don Tiburón approved. "Now let us go back into the cabin again, if you please?"

"I don't please, worth a damn, but you're calling the tune," Matt Herriland retorted. "Well, what's next?"

Back in the cabin—just the don and the captain, now—Tiburón extended a brown cigarette. The captain refused.

"I don't smoke with pirates!"

"As you like," the don smiled, lighting up with one of the captain's matches from his desk. "Pirate, yes, I admit it. That is the interesting rarity these days. But a good profession, *señor*. Interesting, and of profit. Also, fairly safe if intelligently carried on."

"Yeh! I reckon the devil runs hell intelligently! What's next? You going to seize this yacht?"

Don Tiburón shook his head.

"No. I have no use for her. Too conspicuous. A simple *goelette* is more safe; she can pass anywhere, not noticed. So can I, as her capitan. Our papers are all in order, and we really fish. We can always show fishes in our well. But it makes no matter. I do not want the Vagabond."

"Well—devil rip you! What do you want, then?"

"Only one short interview with the owner, in the fort. You will accompany me there."

"All right, you're the boss—just now. Reckon I got to run down the course you're charting."

"Correct. Let us go. *Vamos, Señor Capitan!*"

V

SOME ten minutes later, in the fortress dungeon, Captain Matt Herriland launched a formidable oath. Although the dungeon was now darker than ever, as evening came on, the captain could see at least the outlines of the situation there.

"By God, you people are all on your beam ends!" he ejaculated, staring at the

bound captives, while Don Tiburón smiled, One Eye nodded, and Pablo shuffled naked feet. "This beats any jam I ever was into!"

"What—what's happened, aboard?" Van Kleek quavered. "My word! How soon are we going to be liberated, my good fellow?"

"Is this a real, live pirate?" Judith asked. "How perfectly exciting!"

"At your service, *señorita*," Don Tiburón bowed, whereupon Beryl announced her intention of fainting at once. "Now, Señor Minot, shall we proceed to the business discussion?"

"I'll have no business with you!" Minot erupted. "Why, damn you, d'you know you can be hanged for this—and what's more, you're going to be?"

"Take it on low!" Hull cautioned. "We're all in a split stick, now. You've had more than one competitor in a jam. Now you're getting a taste of your own soothing sirup, and you've got to swallow it like a good boy."

"Swallow nothing! Why, by—"

"Wait!" the don exclaimed, raising a slim hand. "Which of these so charming young ladies is your daughter?"

"I am!" Judith replied.

"In five minutes, if you do not come to the terms," Tiburón warned suavely, but with steel in his voice, "she shall be remove to my schooner—as my own personal property. She shall become—what you call it?—part payment of the ransom. The other young lady, she shall be gave to Gonzales, my mate. So then, Señor Minot, your answer?"

Beryl uttered a faint shriek. Roger Hull swore. Judith grew suddenly wide-eyed and horror-stricken; while Van Kleek broke into incoherencies. As for the banker, he wilted.

"You win," he huskily gulped. "What's happened aboard? What's going to happen to us?"

"The yacht's been taken, sir," Captain Matt answered. "That is, all our arms and ammunition's been captured, and I saw it being rowed away to this pirate's schooner. Our wireless has been stove up and thrown overboard. I had to give in. If I hadn't—"

"Correct!" Don Tiburón corroborated. "If he had not, I should have so regretably ordered you all shot, weighted, and thrown down the cisterns.

"But," he added, in a tone of relief, "I have been most fortunately spared this. Now, nothing remain but to proceed to the business."

"What business?" Minot demanded. "You mean, ransom?"

"What else, *señor*?"

"How much d'you want?"

"Oh, a mere trifle. A bagatelle, for a man of your means."

"What d'you call a trifle, you robber?"

"Be a sport, dad!" cried Judith, who now had recovered much of her aplomb. "You've always boasted you liked holdups. Now, I don't want to see Tiger Minot squeal!"

"I might demand ten million," Don Tiburón judged, thoughtfully. "But, no, no. Even though we have a saying that God is all powerful and money is His lieutenant, I am not greedy. Five million? No, too much. I wish to be reasonable in all things."

"Going down!" Hull jested. "Make it a nickel, don, and let's be on our way."

"You joke me, *señor*. No, one nickel will not suffice. Life and liberty are dear. They are worth a price. But what price? It is hard to say. Ah, I have one idea!"

"Spill the little old idea, don!" Hull remarked. "Ideas always interest me."

"How perfectly corking!" Judith cried. "A real, live pirate's idea!"

"You keep quiet, Judy!" the banker growled. "What d'you think this is? A joke?"

"Well, isn't it—on you? Wait till this gets out in New York. Old Tiger Minot held up, and—"

"Please, Miss Minot!" Hull interrupted. "Don Shark has the floor. Let him spill his alleged idea."

"My idea is simple, like all great ideas," the pirate smiled. "There are three of you gentlemen here. I omit the capitan. He, like me, is one simple seafaring man. My idea is that you three shall purchase, at your own price, certain things."

"What things?" Hull demanded.

"First," and Don T. held up a slim finger, "the release of these so charming *señoritas* from Gonzales and myself. Second, the lives of you three gentlemen. Third, the lives of the capitan and crew. Fourth, permission for you all to go aboard your yacht and depart. That is all I have to sell."

"Oh, I say!" Van Kleek put in, with

unsteady tones. "You mean we're to chip in, and—"

"No! You shall compete, like in—what you call it—"

"An auction?" Hull suggested.

"Ah, that is the word! Auction, yes."

"The deuce!" Van objected. "But it's outrageous. It's not done, you know!"

"Forget it, Van Kleek," Hull ordered.

"Whale of a clever idea, I call it. I congratulate you, Don Shark. Let's go, boys! I open the ball at a hundred thousand!"

"Not enough," the don refused. "Next *señor!*"

"Two hundred!" the banker groaned.

"No!" from Don T.

"Liberal, aren't you, dad?" Judith mocked. "Now, Van, speak up. Let's see how much you love me!"

"My word, I'd give ten million if I had it," Van Kleek stammered. "But—hang it—I'm forced to admit, now, if I strained every resource, I couldn't raise a hundred and fifty thousand. It's all yours, Judy, but your father has already bid two."

"You're out, Van!" Hull laughed. "It's worth something, anyhow, to get your number. I'll go two fifty, don, and let's call it a day!"

"You hold the ladies cheap," Don Tiburón mocked, lighting another cigarette. The match flame revealed his lean and sinister face, sallow, derisive. "To say nothing of the yacht and the lives of everybody. No, I cannot accept a figure so small. I am tempt to set my own price. But I shall yet give you two American financiers a chance. Any offers, more?"

"Half a million!" the banker choked.

"No!" And Don T. dropped the glowing match end, sucked at his cigarette, and smiled. "Now, then, you, Señor Ull?"

"How the devil d'you know my name?" Hull demanded. "Oh, I suppose the captain told you?"

"No. It is my business to know many things. But it does not matter. What offer I hear from you?"

"Seven hundred and fifty thousand!"

"*Muy bien!* Now we finely proceed! But still, I can hardly accept."

"I say, Mr. Minot!" Van protested. "Are you going to let this boulder save Judith and you, the yacht, and all of us? My word, man, where's your pride?"

"It's low, low now," the banker groaned. "Like your cash, you four-flusher! But—well, I make it eight hundred thousand!"

"One million!" Hull promptly offered. "Cold cash!"

"Bully for you!" Judith applauded, while Beryl gasped and Van Kleek blinked. Old Tiger Minot moaned again.

"Enough!" the pirate smiled, blowing a lungful of smoke. "I'm not the greedy dog that drop the real bone, while he reach to the reflection in the river. We have a proverb that one bird in the hand is worth more than a bull flying. You, Señor Ull, have purchase the lot. Now, then—"

"Now what?" Hull queried.

"Now we proceed to the matter of to produce the million—cash. I do not, of course, imagine that you carry the one million on the yachting trip. So, what next? How you get it?"

Hull made no answer. Tensions of silence held them all.

"Another four-flusher!" Van sneered. "Hanged if I believe he's got fifty thousand to his name!"

"What you believe interests me just as much as a silk shirt interests a dinosaur!" Hull retorted. "If Don Shark will let the yacht go back to Key West—"

"Ah, no, I cannot permit it," the pirate declared. "That would be too dangerous for me. And I must have the million in three days. Well, *señor?*"

"Look here, don! Will you let me go on your schooner to Miami, and dig up the cash for you?"

"I thought so!" Van bitterly interjected. "Leave us in the lurch, and make his get-away! A fine fat million this person can produce! My word!"

"If you're calling me a liar," Hull retorted, "we'll settle it later—when both your hands are untied. One of mine, free, will be enough!"

"Do not quarrel, *señores,*" put in the pirate. "Let us lose no time. Your offer to go to Miami cannot be accept. None of you can leave this island till the money is in my hand."

"All right!" Hull said. "Can your schooner make the trip and back in three days?"

"Yes. She have also auxiliary gasoline motor, in case of the calm."

"Fine! I'll soon have the smackers for you, don, and—"

"Smackers? Smackers? What is smackers?"

"The mazuma, berries, tin, simoleons, iron men, rhino. You get me?"

"Alas, no. Do you, perhaps, refer to the money?"

"That's the idea! The *dinero, sabe?* All you've got to do is send the schooner to Miami with a written order from me."

"Order? To whom?"

"To my bankers in New York," Hull explained, while the others hung on every syllable. "An order so worded that they'll recognize my having shot it to 'em, when it crackles off the wire. They'll wire funds—waive identification—to three Miami banks I deal with. Funds that your men, if you've got a respectable looking one among 'em, can collect. O K?"

"To the extent of a million, *señor?*"

"No. But added to what they can draw from still a fourth bank, on my order, it 'll be. Well, don, all to the paprika?"

"You talk the strange language, *señor*, but I gather some idea. You will add four sums, and thus make the million, no? We have the Spanish saying that grain by grain, the hen she fill her estomach. It is well. I accept, but—"

"But what?"

"But remember yourself of one thing! The liberty of these so beautiful young ladies, and the lives of all, are at the estake. If you fail—"

"Don't drill on that, don! Leaping lizards, man! What d'you think I am, a complete moron?"

"I should say not!" Judith laughed. "Of all the larks! You can raise the money all right, Mr. Hull, but—"

"But how about us, all the time?" Beryl queried. "Have we got to stay in this horrid place, tied up?"

"Of no manner!" the don exclaimed. "Everything shall be execute for your comfort, now that the Señor Ull have promise to buy your liberty."

"Damn it, I'm not going to let you stand all the treat!" Minot interrupted. "We'll all ante. Let Van chip in one thin dime. That seems about his limit. You and I, Mr. Hull, will make up the rest, fifty-fifty."

"Nothing stirring!" Hull rejected the offer. "This is my show, now, and you keep out. It 'll nick my roll a bit, but I should care. If you butt in, it's all off."

"Let him do it, dad!" Judith urged. "Isn't this some picnic, though? Being prisoners of real Spanish pirates! All the girls will be green with envy, positively green!"

"You're hopeless, Judy," the banker groaned. "I give in. That's the best little thing I do now, giving in. My hands are tied."

"So are mine," Hull said. "When do we get these ropes off?"

"At once," the don answered. "*Corte!*"

The crisp command brought One Eye into action. He cut the prisoners' bonds, and they fell to rubbing their ridged wrists. Bitter were Minot's grumbled curses.

"Now you are free," Don Tiburón announced. "All but one, who I shall keep as a hostage. But even he shall be well treat. He shall have our best wine and food, in comfortable quarters on the island. The others are very free."

"The devil we are!" Minot retorted. "Free, in this sweat box of a ruin? Starving, I suppose, and with our throats so dry that, by gad, you could strike matches on our tonsils!"

"Not at all," the pirate reassured them. "Come and go, as you like. Make yourselves at home on the yacht. Explore the fort. Three days pass away speedy. Then—you go away with the rejoicements. Good, no?"

"But, I say!" Van Kleek put in. "Suppose this fellow, here, can't raise the money?"

"Come outside!" Hull exclaimed.

"No scrapping, now!" the banker commanded. "Let's get back on board."

"That's right," Captain Matt remarked. "I want to get where I can breathe air that isn't poisoned by these greasy Spigs!"

"Wait!" the don ordered. "Who shall be my hostage?"

"I nominate my friend Van Kleek, here," Hull suggested.

"You boulder!" Van retorted. "What are you up to? Trying to get me murdered in cold blood?"

"Go along, Van, be a sport!" Judith urged. "Show how much you love me!"

"I second Mr. Hull's nomination," the banker declared. "Even if Van is practically broke, he loves his life better than any of us. He'll do everything he can to keep us orderly. And if he happened to get shot, I don't know another man we could spare any better. All in favor of Van Kleek as hostage, signify it in the usual manner!"

The chorus of "*Ayes!*" echoed through the dungeon.

"Contrary minded?"

Van's solitary "*No!*" was absurdly weak.

"It is a vote," Minot announced, "and so ordered."

"I refuse to go!" Van protested. "Suppose this wild man, Hull, cuts up some nonsense or other—what happens to me?"

"You'll be shot at moonrise," Hull replied. "Or sooner!"

"But, my word! It'd be just Hull's dish to get me shot, on purpose! I positively refuse to be the hostage. It's not done, you know. Let the professor be the goat. He doesn't even know he's alive, anyhow, and—"

"You're elected, Van," the banker laughed grimly. "And no resignations will be accepted. Let's get back to the yacht!"

Some still rubbing their wrists, they left the dungeon and the casemate, straggling along the parade ground, and emerged through the sally port, guarded by One Eye, Pablo, and Don Tiburón. From the yacht, silent and glum, mate, sailors, engineer, cook, and steward watched the singular procession approaching.

A dozen or fifteen Cuban nondescripts likewise watched from the rail of the schooner. On that schooner's fo'c's'le, the last rays of the sun now struck out metallic lights from the barrel of a machine gun trained on the yacht. Its muzzle grimly said: "*We mean business!*"

Over the causeway and along the rotted wharf came the straggling captives and guards. Minot now was smiling, and fast recovering his usual good spirits. Beryl uttered an occasional half hysterical laugh. Judith glanced now and then at the imperturbable Roger Hull, who seemed pondering. Captain Matt strode heavily, as in a trance.

Last, with the guards, came Van Kleeck. Sweat beaded his brow, pallid and distraught. Now and again he swallowed hard. He looked like a man walking to his execution. One would have thought at every moment he expected to feel a bullet between his thin ribs.

A singular procession, indeed! As it approached the yacht, all at once out of the cabin companionway appeared Professor Saltmarsh, with his Angelina after him.

"You did not see my parasol up there in the fort, did you?" he called out with some agitation. "If so, why did you not bring it with you?"

"Parasol be damned!" the banker roared. "Here we're all captured, black-mailed, pirated, robbed, murdered, shot, and maybe going to get our throats cut into the bargain! And you—you want to know if we've seen your parasol!"

"Yes, but," Angelina chimed in, "in the tropics—"

"We'll all land in a damned sight hotter place than the tropics if we don't watch our step!" Minot vociferated. "I hope you and your parasol go there first!"

"Be calm, *señor*," Don Tiburón warned. "Do not become agitate. In these latitude, it do not pay. All of you now go on board, if you wish—all but the Señores Ull and Van Kleeck. The rest are free. Only, remember yourselves that—"

"Remember what?" the banker flung at him.

"If you signal with flags or wavings to any other vessel, it will be fatal to you all. And we bury the fallen where they fall. Also, the man who even touch a hawser of the yacht, he die immediately. Any rebellion, and the hostage perish at once!"

"Isn't this perfectly scrumptious?" Judith laughed. "It's just exactly what I expected piracy would be like, only lots more exciting. Don Shark, if you only had a cutlass between your teeth and a bandanna round your head, you'd be a perfect knock-out!"

"Knock-out, knock-out?" the don asked, puzzled. "What is knock-out? But it matter nothing? Come, Señor Van Kleeck. You now retire to the place where you will be incarcerated and guard as hostage. Come, Señor Ull. There is much for you and I to do. And all the others, rest well and amuse yourselves. *Hasta la vista*—good-by, *señores!*"

VI

SOUTHWARD along the bit of land that edges the eastern side of Fort Jefferson, where the sally port pierces those forbidding walls, extends a weed-grown sandy stretch. Leaving One Eye and Pablo on the wharf to guard the Vagabond by land, while the machine gun commanded her by sea, Don Tiburón walked Hull and Van Kleeck along this sandy fringe of the island, toward the hurricane-twisted wreckage of the coaling station.

"D'you know, don," Hull remarked pleasantly, "I've got a hunch you and I are going to get on fine together?" He

smiled a frank, white-toothed smile. "I like your business methods. So efficient, and all! The regular old direct action stuff. No pussy-footing!"

"Pussy-footing? Oh, I see. The foot of the pussy. The cat, eh? How amusing the Americano language! No, *señor*, I do not walk on the foot of the cat. I proceed directly to the end, and what I say, I accomplish it."

"You sure do! That's the kind of a man I like to work with! But, don—well, if you've got a cigarette that isn't working, I could use it. I happen to be all out. That means I'm all in."

"All out is all in? I shall never comprehend the Americano tongue. I learn my Inglis in Gibraltar. It is different. But—pardon my grand discourtesy!" the Spaniard exclaimed, producing a packet of those really excellent *papeles* smoked by all Havana. "You will forgive me?"

"Don't mention it, don! I think my dear friend Van, here, could use one, too."

But Van Kleek motioned the packet away.

"Damn it, no! My word, isn't it enough to be butchered to make a Cuban holiday," he mournfully demanded, "without having to smoke those beastly abominations? My own are good enough for me when I want one—which I certainly don't now!"

"Well, these brown babies are the stuff for me," Hull declared as he lighted up and walked along through weeds and sand. "I'd perambulate more than a mile for one any day."

"Wish I could go half that distance anywhere," Van said, "to get out of this hideous fix your malice has put me in. I say, but you are a vindictive fellow, aren't you?"

"No, only a bounder," Hull returned. "But I believe a man bounds some, too, when a bullet hits him. However, old thing, brace up. Cold feet never won fair lady. Well, don, where do we go from here?"

"You and I go aboard my schooner, the *Estrella de la Mar*," Don T. informed him, "after we so comfortably dispose of the Señor Van Kleek."

"Star of the Sea, eh? Pretty name for a schooner."

"You understand the Espanish very fine!"

"Oh, no; just a few words. I'm not duck high to an ostrich when you begin to

sling it in bunches. I'd like to learn, though. Teach me a few good, handy phrases?"

"With all the pleasure in the world!"

Trailing tobacco smoke, Hull and the pirate walked amicably along, with Van Kleek following. As they went, Hull and the white-clad, big-hatted Spaniard pleasantly chatted in a mixture of English and Castilian. Hull touched lightly on Havana, spoke feelingly of Barcelona, complimented Alfonso XIII as a first-rate sportsman, and ended with:

"You Spaniards have always made a hit with me, don. Your rough-and-ready methods haven't always been pure as the driven snow, but they've landed with both feet. I've just been reading Bernal Diaz on the conquest of Mexico. Some conquest, believe me! As a piece of primitive, go-get-it looting, it's never been equalled. You people have been the big central wow when it comes to gathering!"

Don Tiburón's lean, swarthy face lighted with a smile of genuine affability.

"Wow? Wow? What is wow?" he asked. "But never mind. I gather your general significance. Only—you flatter us, *señor*!"

"No banana oil, don, it's a fact! If I couldn't be a financier, myself, I'd like to pin the pirate badge on my chest better than anything else I know. Not much difference between 'em, after all, eh?"

"We may discuss that, more late. But now here we arrive to the quarters—regrettably primitive—where the Señor Van Kleek is to be entertain."

He motioned both the captives to stop, then advanced toward the intricate tangle of steel girders and corrugated iron that once had been Uncle Sam's Dry Tortugas coaling station. There he gave a whistle like the note of a *palomita*, or Cuban wild wood dove. An immediate answer, in kind, issued from beneath the girders.

Hinges creaked, and almost at once a broad, unshaven face, surmounted by a little round Basque cap, grew visible. This face seemed to rise, like a moon, from behind a broken concrete foundation wall. It peered and smiled, showing bad teeth.

"A guest for you, Chico!" the pirate announced in Spanish.

"Bueno, jefe! *Que venga*!"

At this acknowledgment to the chief that the prisoner was to advance, Hull beckoned the wretched Van Kleek.

"Come on, Van, old top!" he announced. "Go to papa!"

"You—you don't mean to say," Van protested, "that I—I'm going to be left in charge of that ruffian? My word, I say! And down in that infernal junk heap?"

"Chico is really an excellent fellow," Don T. assured him, "like Jaime, who will help him guard you. And you will find as many modern conveniences as our so poor means can provide."

"Yes, but—"

Don Tiburón, his face hardening, beckoned Chico. This worthy subpirate advanced in a ragged shirt and immensely flapping white trousers, and laid a scabrous hand on Van.

"You'd better step on it, old chap, or they'll drag you," Hull warned. "Don't start off by making a bad impression. You're liable enough to get your gears stripped, anyhow, without getting the pirates sore to begin with. Skate along nice and peaceful, like Mary's little lamby, and stay parked until called for."

"You be damned! You're just gloating over this!" the miserable Van retorted. "Things like this aren't done. You'll be the first to start something, so as to get me jolly well shot!"

"Señores, do not quarrel!" Don Tiburón interposed. "Time presses. Go quick, Meester Van. Obey orders, and your life may be save. But my brave companions are not too patient with the complainings, so be warned in time. You, Señor Ull, do me the honor of to come with me now to the schooner?"

As Van Kleek, still protesting, was dragged away by Chico into some mysterious subterranean depths—much as a fly is dragged by a spider—Don Tiburón turned and led the way to a beach that whitely gleamed at the lower edge of the weedy stretch. Here marvelous conchs glowed iridescently, lacelike globes of sea-urchin shells lay scattered, and below the lazy surf the urchins themselves, huge and black, thrust up immense spines.

Don T. waved a signaling hand at the schooner. Two barefoot fellows leaped into the dinghy, now alongside, cast off and came rowing over the easy swell. Hull noticed that they did not jump overboard and drag their boat up when she grounded, as sailors usually do, but took good care to clamber over the bows.

"I reckon those sea urchins—*erizos*, you know—wouldn't be any too easy on the feet?" he queried.

"They are bad, very bad," the don explained. "Very poison. They make the wounds horrible painful, and the spines cannot to be pull out till the full of the moon. So our sailor superstition is."

"You don't say?" Hull exclaimed, as he climbed into the dinghy. "You're not superstitious, of course?"

"Me? Ah, no. But my brave fellows—you know what men of this class are like, all over the earth. Sit to the stern, please, señor. Yes, that is correct."

Don Tiburón rejoined him there. The barefoot pirates got aboard and shoved off with their oars. In a few minutes the dinghy had arrived at the schooner's low rail, amidships, and Hull had gone aboard with the don.

"Tidy little craft you've got here, *compañero*," Hull approved, though it was anything but tidy. What the immortal Shakespeare denominated "a most ancient and fishlike odor" arose under the still heated rays of sunset.

Everything about the decks lay in sovereign disorder. Paint was scarred, chipped, dirty. Metal was dull and salt-incrusted. Even the machine gun showed patches of rust.

Halyards hung loose-tangled. No cordage lay flemished down, shipshape and Bristol fashion, as in smart schooners. Casks, water buckets, and an *olla-podrida* of gear cluttered the craft. As a pirate schooner, she looked a sorry disappointment—unromantic.

Forward of the fish well, a brace of ruffians squatted, cutting up a loggerhead turtle on the filthy deck. Others loafed and smoked where they pleased, even aft. A mange-bitten brown cur yapped and wagged what had once been a tail. But for all this, Hull repeated:

"Fine, tidy little craft, Don Tiburón!"

"It is yours," the buccaneer voiced the empty Spanish formula that always offers you whatever you praise. "But you flatter us. No, the *Estrella* is not fine and tidy. She is a merely fisherman, like all the others. Thus she escape of the public notice."

"You really have fish? No kidding?"

"Kidding? What is kidding? Oh, you mean the deceptions? *Sí, sí*—fish! Allow me the pleasure to show you!"

He gave a curt order. Three of the crew—which seemed to total some sixteen men—shuffled to the hatch cover of the well, tipped it over on deck, and revealed cool emerald depths.

"*Magnífico!*" Hull approved, peering down. "Now that's what I call fish. Yankee anglers would go wild over 'em!"

Splendid fish, indeed, half filled the well. A richly luminous tint of jade suffused the inclosed waters, which freely entered through a profusion of holes bored in the side and bottom of the tank—that is to say, the sides and bottom of the schooner herself.

In this lovely pool of limpid, translucent color swam tropical fishes—amberjacks, grunts, and groupers, with angel fish and a barracuda or two. Staring, pouting absurdly, they approached the surface with goggly eyes, then flipped about and sank.

"This is certainly a grand aquarium," Hull approved; "but isn't it dangerous to have all those holes in the vessel?"

"Ah, no, *señor*," the don assured him, indulgently smiling. "We have the—what you call it?—bulkheads, fore and aft, to keep the water from reach the rest of the schooner."

"I see. I'm a perfect boob on ships."

"Boob? Ah, you mean the ignorance? It matters nothing," and Don T. shrugged his thin shoulders. "I gladly explain to so *simpático* a guest."

"Thanks, don! But suppose a bulkhead should spring a leak, or get blown out by an explosion—what then?"

"Then, of course, we should commend our souls to Heaven. We would sink, of an assurance. But she is strong, the *Estrella*. So—shall we now go below to the so poor cabin? Allow me, that I conduct you!"

Hull followed the pirate aft, through most unnautical confusion.

"By the way," he remarked, in solid Spanish, so that several could hear, "your men should not have laid that hatch cover on the deck upside down. I would not do that for the world!"

"No? You mean, the old superstition of sailors?"

"Call it what you will, don. I have seen it happen too often. I have seen too much damage at sea—even ships lost—after a hatch cover was tipped over. It is almost worse than tearing a flag or whistling for a wind!"

The pirate shrugged indifferently, but his brows wrinkled. He relapsed into English with:

"I will speak to them of this. It shall not happen again."

They had by now reached the deck aft of the cabin housing. There, totally indifferent to a strong smell of gasoline, a few grimy fellows lounged, idly smoking.

"Whew!" Hull exclaimed, as his shrewd gray eyes fell on a half dozen gasoline drums standing three at each side, along the counter. "You carry your gas on deck?"

"Yes, *señor*. Below, in the hold, the fumes would be choking."

"There oughtn't to be any fumes, don—not a fume! You oughtn't to carry a single leaky drum on an old wooden fire trap of a schooner like this. And look at those men smoking!"

"We have a proverb that no one catches fish with dry trousers on. The sea—it is always dangerous."

"Correct! But this is plain suicide. Suppose one of 'em didn't throw his matches overboard, but just happened to drop a lighted one anywhere round here—"

"The *señor* is critical," Don Tiburón returned, frowning. "But, yes—you have reason. I shall stop all the smoking here—even at the wheel."

"Great diving ducks, man! Smoking at the wheel?"

Don T., piqued, turned to the idlers and rasped out an order that drove them forward. Then, with a wave of the hand:

"Now, *señor*, if you will honor me by descending to our so humble cabin?"

Hull found the cabin dark. It was painted a dismal blue, the favorite color of so many Cubans when they slap paint on wood.

The place looked even more untidy than the decks had been. Aft, an opening showed glimpses of the engine, rusty but competent. Dirty bunks curved at either hand, with benches in front of them.

A *porrón*—earthen water cooler—that showed many finger-prints, swung from a beam overhead. Wooden spittoons stood here and there. Old clothes, gaudy calendars and gay-colored lithographs of saints depended from nails driven here and there on the forward bulkhead.

A greasy table occupied the center, and under it a yellow cat gnawed the backbone of a fish. Mingled stench of gasoline,

cookery, cigarette smoke and bilge water thickened the air.

A sound of snoring drew Hull's attention to a figure in one of the tousled bunks. Dimly seen, the sleeper looked enormous; a huge, hairy rascal with corded arms all covered by tattooing, sockless feet laced into blue *alpargatas* or rope-soled sandals, a dingy red Basque sash twisted about his waist, and torn sailcloth trousers that very long ago might have been white.

"*Venga, compadre!*" Don T. called the slumberer, and clapped him on the shoulder. "He is my mate, Gonzales," the don explained, as this worthy heaved himself up and rubbed somnolent eyes. "A Basque, speaks nothing but his own God-knows-what dialect and the Spanish, but a capable navigator. A good man in every way except his most violent temper."

"So?" Hull queried. "I am charmed to meet the gentleman."

"Yes. He will kill a man as quick as he will look at him. But, as we say, every man is as God made him, and sometimes much worse. Nobody can be perfect."

"And after all," the don smiled, "a gentle temper is not of the advantageous for a pirate. I myself have often suffer from being too kind of my heart. Allow me, *señor?*"

He opened a locker, produced a bottle of Bacardi and three glasses, and set them on the table.

"It is the real rum," he explained. "If wine is the blood of the aged, rum is the life of the strong. Shall we drink to the success of all?"

"Thanks, not just now," Hull declined. "That stuff always gets into my bean and shoves business over the horizon. And we've got business to do now, don. It's got to be done right, too, or all us Americans may get junked."

"Junked? Ah, injured! I see. Very well, as you wish," the pirate agreed, while Gonzales—unshaven, heavy jawed, and with a lowering eye—crawled out upon a bench and sat there blinking dully. "So, then, to business, eh?"

"Suits this baby! The quicker, the sooner!"

The don, from farther recesses of the locker, brought a little writing desk affair of mahogany with ornate brass hinges—part of the loot, perhaps, from some previous raid. This, when opened on the table, revealed paper, envelopes, inkwell, pens.

"That's a beaut!" Hull admired.

"It is yours, *señor*. Consider that you own it."

"Consider yourself kissed, don. You're all set for everything, aren't you?"

"You mean prepared? Ah, yes. It is always necessary in my profession. So, help yourself, and proceed as you wish."

"Thanks, don, I will!"

Carefully choosing the best paper, Hull composed two messages with great deliberation. One was a long telegram to Ferrell & Garland, brokers, 46A Broad Street, New York; the other to the Palmetto National Bank, Miami.

As he wrote, Don Tiburón and Gonzales watched him intently. They smoked cigarettes, blew gray rings, and now and then exchanged significant glances. The cat continued gnawing the fish's backbone. The light faded even more; but Hull wrote on, erased, changed, recomposed, then copied both messages on other sheets.

While all this was doing, one or the other Spaniard murmured a remark. At a comment by Gonzales, Don T. frowned and shook his head with some agitation.

"*Que va!*" he growled; which may mean as many kinds of refusal, rejection, even disgust, as a man will need in a year.

But now, having finished his messages and envelopes for them, Hull looked up and asked:

"Shall I read 'em to you, don?"

"Yes, if you will do me that honor."

Hull read them, slowly, pausing now and then to let the meaning of every word sink in. When he had done, he handed them over to the pirate with: "Now you read 'em yourself. I want you to see it's all open and aboveboard. No flimflam. These messages will land you the heavy sugar, all right."

"Sugar?"

"I mean the thick sirup, the kale, the coin. No trickery, don. It's all as open-faced as a dollar watch."

"Trickery, no, you cannot attempt such," the don declared. "With the banker's daughter destined for me, if I am opposed, and with the other *señorita* to be gave to Gonzales, also with all the others' lives at estate, only a madman would attempt trickery. And you are far from being mad."

"Thank you, kind sir. Well, everything all to the good?"

Don Tiburón, squinting by the light that

faded down through the companionway, read both messages most attentively. Then he nodded, sealed them, and tossed them into his writing desk, which he replaced in the locker.

"Bueno!" he smiled. "We are getting on esplendidly. So much, now, for business. Let us have a drop of rum!"

He acted as host. Hull clinked glasses with both his captors.

"Happy days! This is the real stuff!"

"It is yours, señor. All that we have is yours. We drink to your health!"

The three drank, lighted cigarettes, and remained sitting, as if this were a mere friendly visit. Mellowed by the rum, Gonzales even began to smile a bit.

"He should not smile," the don remarked. "We have some trouble of our own."

"What trouble?" Hull sympathetically asked.

"There must be delays. The schooner cannot sail at once."

"Why not, don? What's the matter?"

"The tide does not serve. We say in Spanish, no matter how early you get up, you cannot hurry the sun rising. It is similarly with the tide. This channel is very shallow. We draw a little too much to leave for Miami at once."

"When can you pull out?"

"The tide, she is still falling. We must wait for her to turn upward again. Eleven o'clock, Gonzales say, will be of the earliest start."

"Oh, well," the American smiled, "that's only five hours. It won't matter. You can give us five hours more leeway at the other end. That's fair, eh?"

"Yes, agreed. But—"

"And now, don, if you don't mind, I'll be beating it back to the yacht."

Gonzales, however, considerably more affable than at first, had reached into an upper bunk and brought down a guitar. This he began thrumming in the dusk, with fingers surprisingly agile for their muscular thickness. After a few chords, sonorous and rich, he began on a minor key:

"Ole, con ole, con ole!
Ole, con ole, salero!
Fatigas me dan de muerte,
Cuando veo un cuerpo bueno!"

"Hot tamale!" Hull approved. "In other words, when he sees a pretty girl, it makes him want to die with longing?"

"How well you know the Spanish, señor!"

"Oh, no. But I often heard that song in Spain, and Cuba, too. Some class!"

"Gonzales, he become sentimental when he have Bacardi," the don explained. "Just now, he think of the señorita on the yacht. We have a proverb that a melon and a woman should be fairly ripe. He adore both the ripe melon, Gonzales does, and the ripe woman!"

Hull's mouth hardened. His face twitched, but in the gloom Don Tiburón could not observe this. Again Gonzales sang:

"Pajaro que vas volando,
Y en el pico llevas hilo,
Dámelo para coser
Mi corazón que está herido!"

The American forced a laugh.

"I know that one, too. All about asking the flying bird with the thread in its bill to give him the thread so he can sew up his wounded heart. Romantic pirate!"

"We are romantic all, we Spanish," the don assented, taking the guitar. "Tum-te-tum-tum-tum-tum—how it go? Ah, yes!" And with a sudden, throbbing accompaniment, he began:

"Es tu pelo cadena
De muchas almas.
Y cuanto mas lo sueltas,
Mejor las atas!"

"Los cabellos de mi rubia,
Se los ha robado al sol.
Y a mi me ha robado el alma,
La vida y el corazón!"

"Bravo!" Hull applauded. "May I warble?"

"You, señor? You sing the Spanish songs?"

"Oh, I make a stab at a few. Thanks!" as Don T. handed him the guitar. Curious, eager faces dimly appeared at the companionway. Pirates though they be, what Spaniards or Cubans can resist music?

Hull ran a few chords; then, in a somewhat dry but not wholly displeasing tenor, he sang:

"Un jardinero de amor
Sembra una planta y se va.
Otro viene y la cultiva.
De cual de los dos sera?"

Vociferous applause from the companionway greeted this choice sentiment.

"Ole, tu madre!" one pirate shouted. A second cried out: "Viva! Otra vez!"

With a laugh, Hull once more plucked the strings and was about to continue, when an agonized yell echoed from the island.

A shot cracked. Another!
Instantly all was confusion.

VII

DON TIBURÓN, with a sulphurous oath, flung himself up the companionway. Gonzales, astonishingly agile, came second, with Hull a close third.

"Good *night!*" the American cried.

Out on deck some evening glow still lingered. Although a few calm stars had begun to peep, enough light remained to reveal an extraordinary and highly painful spectacle.

This was no less than the unfortunate Van Kleeck in headlong flight along the sandy and weed-grown stretch, with Chico hotly pursuing.

Shouts rang from the yacht, as well as from Pablo and One Eye, on the wharf. Another startled cry betrayed the presence of Alcibiades Saltmarsh halfway from the fort to the yacht, whither he was returning with the parasol that Angelina had sent him to retrieve.

But no one, not even Chico, Don Tiburón or Gonzales, was now yelling so loudly as the pale and hunted Van Kleeck. How he had escaped from Chico, who could tell?

What madness of terror had induced him—ignoring the guards on the wharf—to break and run for the yacht, who knew? The lamentable fact remained that he was running, and wildly. Let that suffice.

In white ducks and with screams of panic, he sped. No cinder path expert could have overtaken him. Sand flew from his winged heels. His hair wavered in the wind of his own swiftness.

Chico, with a most improper aspersion on Van's ancestry, halted, aimed his revolver, fired. The bullet kicked up a little spindrift of sand, close beside Van's leaping feet. Another pinged into the causeway near by.

"My goodness gracious!" the professor exclaimed, hoisting his parasol. This he held sidewise for a defensive shield against Chico's bombardment, as—with a speed one never could have suspected in him—he scudded for the yacht.

"Lie down, Alcibiades!" Angelina quavered. "Take cover—lie down!"

But the professor, ignoring this advice, continued to scud.

So, too, did Van Kleeck. His yelps of mortal anguish echoed from the fort's grim red walls, out across the channel.

"Stop, you plain, damn fool!" Hull roared. "Surrender!"

Van sped only faster. "Save me!" he shrieked. "*Save me!*"

"Want to get killed?" Hull shouted. "Want to get us all killed?"

Not Hull's shouts, but the sudden appearance of Pablo and One Eye ahead, with guns in hand, halted him a moment.

"Don't shoot!" the don howled, in Spanish. "Take him alive!"

Van Kleeck's hesitation was only momentary. Hemmed in by Chico at the rear, by the two other pirates in front, and on his right hand by the sea, none but a westward course lay open.

He, therefore, swerved in that direction, toward the moat. Up through the weeds he scampered like a rabbit, reached the moat wall, and, without a second's faltering, leaped.

A splash followed—then for a moment all grew still.

"*Caramba!*" the don yelled. "Fish him out, you sons of Satan! If he drowns, you die!"

With a jumble of execrations, all three Cubans on the beach ran to the moat. Captain Matt came speeding with a rope.

Hull, white hot with rage, watched them dangle this rope; and presently, in the lovely evening glimmer, he beheld Van Kleeck again. Van, in the guise of an immersed kitten, was ignominiously dragged out.

Sounds of unseemly merriment drifted from the Vagabond. Judith was leaning against the companionway, with tears coursing down her tanned cheeks. They were not tears of grief.

Old Tiger Minot swore mouth-fillingly. Beryl Chatfield uttered little, fainting cries. As for Angelina Saltmarsh, she received her husband with broken half sentences, demanding where he was wounded; then hastened below for iodine and the ice bag.

"You triple-expansion lunatic!" Hull shouted as the pirates dragged Van Kleeck, dripping, down the beach. "If you pull that stunt again, I hope to God they make you into hamburg steak!"

"My—my word!" Van panted. "That's your big idea, you boulder! You're just waiting to see me butchered—and so are all the rest of 'em. I say! This isn't *my* cruise. I demand to be taken home!"

"You'll land in a damn sight hotter place than home if you don't obey orders!" Hull vociferated.

"See here, don," he addressed the pirate. "That infernal *loco* is endangering us all. Why not take another hostage? Here—take *me*!"

"You, *señor*? After you have accepted our hospitality, and sing the Spanish song? Ah, no!" Don T., smiling again, spread hands of negation. "No, the miserable one shall remain our hostage, as before. But," and the smile darkened to a frown, "next time he shall not escape so easy. We have the proverb that law is a spider web catching the fly, but letting the hawk go free. The *Señor Van Kleek*, he is no hawk. And our law is blood and iron!"

"Right-o, don! That's the correct dope!"

"Also, we bury them where they fall."

"Van, you idiot!" Hull shouted. "They'll bury you where you fall, next time. Now go on back and be a reasonable hostage. No more skidding on the turns."

Don T. issued crackling orders to his minions on the beach. They led the wretched Van Kleek, still dripping, back to their coal shed lair.

"But he certainly stepped on it, don," Hull remarked. "I didn't think the boy had the goods, like that. He wasn't the snail's broken leg for speed, now was he?"

"Snail's leg? What—? Ah, I comprehend. Excellent! How I shall learn much *Americano* from you! Ha-ha! Very good. No, he make the rapid speeding. But—"

Just before Van disappeared, he turned and shook a fist at Hull. His voice, a quiver, drifted out over those lovely indigo waters, tinged by the rosy afterglow of eventide:

"Wait till I get out of this bally mess, you rotter! My word, if I don't fix you—"

But, being swiftly jerked out of sight by ungentle and most plebeian hands, his threat remained unfinished.

"Whew! Thank God, that's done! And no casualties!" Hull exclaimed, as he wiped sweat from his brow. "Don Tiburón, let me apologize for my fellow countryman. I am ashamed, humiliated, knocked for a row of goals, and—"

"I entreat you shall not to mention it," the pirate interrupted. "I had intentions

to remark: 'This outbreak, *señor*, it will cost you one extra hundred thousand.' But no, no! We have a saying that to do good to escoundrels is throwing water to the ocean. But you are not, like that miserable one, a escoundrel. No, *señor*, you are of the bravest! So let it pass away. Between two gentlemen—"

"Thanks, don, for those few kind words and the peanut!" Hull extended his hand, which Don T. warmly took. "I'll do as much for you, some day. I'll certainly do you for as much! You're all to the well-known mustard!"

"Mustard? Mustard?"

"I mean, in good grammar, you're the goods, the berries, a lallapalooza, savvy? In other words, you're there with the chimes on, forty-seven ways!"

"Oh, I am confuse! I speak only the Inglis and the Espanish, and this is neither. But no import! All is good what finish good, as your great Eshakespeare say it," the don quoted, as Gonzales stood glowering, and the pirate crew hung along the rail, regretful that all the excitement was over. "Our business is done. It would give me greatest pleasure to have you for a time, yet, remain aboard the eschooner, which is now yours. But if you desire to return to your friends—"

"Thanks, old chap! Yes, reckon I'd better be pulling my freight. They'll all be anxious to know what's doing. So—when you're ready?"

"The boat, *señor*, is to your disposing."

Hull walked forward, cast a leg over the rail, and glanced back in the gloaming.

"When 'll I see you again, don?" he queried. "I've taken quite a shine to you."

"Shine?"

"I mean, I like you. And this pirate business is hot spaniel, too. I'd love to get into it, myself, if you'd take an apprenticeship. But never mind about that, now. When 'll I see you again?"

The pirate shrugged. Hull asked:

"You're going to Miami, of course?"

"No, *señor*. I remain in command, at the island. Gonzales, he will navigate."

"Is he smooth enough to collect the money? I mean, is his appearance correct for the business at the banks?"

"Oh, the business? No, no, he will not do it. We have—what you say?—partners at Miami. With best possible of the appearances. That is all arrange."

"Fine! Well, I'm glad you're staying. See you to-morrow, don. Have a few more songs, eh?"

"As the *señor* wish. He have but to command, where all belong to him."

"Thanks! So long!"

Hull jumped down into the dinghy.

Two ruffians followed him. Another cast off the painter.

The oarsmen gave way, and Hull departed over the star-wimpled swells, seated in the stern sheets like a very nabob. He waved an amicable hand at Don Tiburón, who saluted in reply, and then, turning, went below.

"Hot stuff!" Hull thought. "If I haven't got that shark hooked through the gills, I don't know. Hot stuff—and it 'll be hotter before midnight, or I miss my number!"

Aboard the *Vagabond*, he had a lively quarter hour expounding the train of events.

It would take pages to record the torrent of questions poured on him, the fumings of old Minot and of Captain Matt, the thrills of Judith and the agitation of Beryl, likewise the citations of famous piracies by the professor, and the worries of his excellent Angelina.

Suffice, however, that though all disagreed on nearly everything else, all combined in execrating the unhappy Van Kleek. His ears, in that mysterious sub-coal shed lair, must have burned crimson.

Something like calm eventually descended on the yacht. Hope revived. Hull's generalship received universal commendation, and all hands deposited their burdens on his shoulders.

That the schooner would reach Miami, collect the million, and return inside of the stipulated three days became an article of faith to all. And when Sukui announced a belated dinner, reasonably good digestion waited on appetite.

Night found all the principals aft under the awning, with pipes, cigars, and cigarettes. Not even the armed guards on the wharf, nor yet the machine gun trained on the yacht, could now greatly disturb the *Vagabond's* passengers. The professor himself went so far as to take a mild Havana, despite his wife's admonition:

"But, my dear, nicotine hardens the arteries, dims the vision, and affects the brain—and your poor head is *so* weak!"

"There, there, my love!" he made bold to retort. "On an occasion like this, of rescue from almost certain death, surely I may be allowed the privilege of a single *Vuelta Abajo*! Its percentage of nicotine registers extremely low—hardly more than twenty-eight and six-tenths per centum of the really powerful tobaccos, and—"

Talk ran round—or rather, trickled. Notwithstanding a sort of fatalistic optimism, undercurrents of anxiety nevertheless still continued to flow.

Blacker grew the night, pierced only by the large, beaming tropic stars, and by the schooner's riding light on her forestay; for this was the dark of the moon, and no golden disk arose over the far horizons.

The riding light seemed a Cyclopean eye, watching the helpless and disarmed yacht. On the wharf, vague whitish blurs indicated the presence of the sentinels.

Beyond them loomed the vast, inchoate and oppressive mightiness of the fortress walls, over which at twenty-second intervals flashed a pale and ghostly gleam. Like a spoke of spectral light, it swung and slowly faded, only to reappear again on the other side. This far, tenuous illumination proceeded from the distant lighthouse on Loggerhead Key, away off to westward.

"Wonder if there mightn't be some way, by gad," the banker mumbled around his glowing Londres, "to get word over to the lightkeepers? If we could—"

"If we did, exit friend Van!" Hull cut in. "Poor Van, sacrificed on the altars, not of patriotism, but of piraticism! No, Mr. Minot, it can't be did. We're all on our own, here. And we should worry! Three days from now it 'll be a happy memory." Hull blew out a smoke ring, and eyed it contemplatively. "What, after all, are three days between friends?"

"And what a gorgeous lot of thrills we may get in those three days!" Judith exclaimed, knocking the ash from her cigarette. "I never had such a lark in all my born days. Don't you think Don Tibby is just priceless? So handsome and—well, you know what I mean."

"As a sheik, he certainly is broadcasting with all the amplifiers attached," Hull conceded. "Talented, too. Sings delightfully. Love songs. A wiz on the guitar. Very polished manners. A fly would skid on the don. Shouldn't wonder if he was the black sheep of some noble Spanish family."

"What they call a high dago?" Beryl insinuated.

"*Hidalgo* is the correct Spanish word," the professor put in. "By the way, we all owe much to Mr. Hull's proficiency in Spanish. I envy him, I am sure."

"Oh, that's nothing!" Hull disclaimed. "I'd be a poor pickled fish if I couldn't sling a little of it, after all the time I've lived in Spig countries!"

"Do you honestly think," Judith insisted, "that Tibby's a nobleman?"

"Well, only the nobility are called 'don.'"

"How perfectly wonderful! Just imagine being pirated by a real live Spanish grandee!"

"For Heaven's sake, Judy!" the banker exclaimed. "Forget such nonsense, or I warn you my blood pressure will go up again!"

So the talk ran around, an hour or more, finally ending in the usual "Ho-hum!" and "Well—" that signals the break-up of every party. Not long thereafter all the passengers were sleeping, worn out by that day's strenuous events. Even Angelina Saltmarsh, despite her most conscientious efforts to keep awake and worry, drifted off to oblivion.

All were asleep? No, not quite all. One still remained awake and thoughtful in his stateroom. This one was not only awake, but also was busied in certain noiseless preparations for certain deeds whereof we later shall know more.

And so time passed, as time insists on doing for us all; and four bells of the first night watch arrived—in landsmen's parlance, 10 P.M.

An hour more and the pirate schooner, *Estrella de la Mar*, or *Star of the Sea*, would be getting under way. Before that time, however, other things were destined to occur.

And now, proceeding to these other things, let us remark that shortly after ten o'clock the cabin door gently opened and an eye peered into the night.

That eye remained a moment keenly observant. It saw the schooner's riding light, also a vague fan of illumination that spread up into the night mist from the schooner's companionway.

It likewise observed two vague blurs which represented the two guards on the wharf. Neither blur, however, moved.

And certain muffled snores revealed the indubitable fact that these unfaithful custodians, sprawled against the ruinous shed, were far from mundane cares.

So far, so good. But what of the tiny pinpoint of light that waxed and waned up there by the sally port? The eye pondered. That pinpoint must obviously be a cigarette end. Where there was a cigarette end, there must be a person; in this case, most undoubtedly another guard.

Why should there be a guard at the sally port? Could it be that the pirates had carried their machine gun ashore and mounted it at that vantage point, to rake the *Vagabond*, on the one hand, in case of rebellion, and, on the other hand, to mow down the wretched Van Kleek if he once more sought to flee?

This looked reasonable, and the eye decided that beyond question the machine gun now stood at the entrance to the sally port.

"Let it stand!" the owner of the eye decided. "We should worry about machine guns!"

After several minutes of watchful waiting, the eye appeared satisfied with the prospect. The companionway opened still more widely, without the ghost of a sound, and out slid a dark figure which controlled the aforesaid eye.

A mere shadow in the night, it closed the companionway again. It stopped, looked, and listened. The danger always existed that some member of the crew, on watch forward, might detect these furtive activities. But no, nothing stirred. All remained silent as the Wall Street district on Sunday evening.

Now the figure crept to the port rail, away from the wharf, and for still one more moment paused and crouched. It wore only a bathing suit, and from its neck depended—by a stout cord—a cylindrical object. Another something was belted round its waist, and still another something, small and metallic, was gripped between its teeth.

But who the figure was—of that we must still remain ignorant. We may guess and we may speculate, but we cannot know.

The mysterious figure did not long remain crouching at the yacht's rail. It was now satisfied that the coast was reasonably clear for its equally mysterious plans and purposes. Without further delays, then, it slid over the rail, noiselessly let itself down

by a fender, and slid without a sound into the black and star-flecked waters.

Unheeding the sinister reputation of Tortugan waters, in the matter of sharks, the figure silently swam toward the Estrella. Hardly swam; drifted, rather let us say. Head barely above the surface, it floated gently onward, with scarcely more than a wimple.

No one saw it. Had any one seen, it would have appeared no more than a bit of driftwood, or perhaps a knot of gulf weed. Thus, a mere specter of darkness on that sea of night, it progressed gently and silently toward the pirate craft.

The distance separating the pirates from the Vagabond hardly exceeded a cable's length, which is to say, a hundred fathoms. In something less than a quarter hour, the all but invisible shadow had reached the schooner's stern. There it blent with shadows even more profound than in the open night.

Silence held the schooner; save for a slight murmur of voices in the cabin, and the occasional faint clink of glasses that revealed libations going round. Spirits were evidently high aboard the Estrella. Once or twice a laugh vaguely sounded, as the hour approached for sailing off to Miami and the million dollars.

Beneath the Estrella's stern, meanwhile, no sound or ripple evidenced the presence of a something that awaited, motionless and silent in the tropic night.

VIII

At about ten thirty activities stirred aboard the Estrella.

Men stumbled up on deck. Voices, a trifle sullied with Bacardi, sounded more loudly.

Don Tiburón got down into the dinghy. With a few final instructions, he was rowed ashore to the beach, where he remained while the dinghy departed.

The men who had it in charge went on board amidships, then trailed it aft and made it fast astern by its long painter. Others were meantime lowering the riding light and extinguishing it, kindling the side lights, breaking out and hoisting the anchor, sweating up canvas.

Gonzales, at the wheel, directed the course as, with a slight fan of air, the *goelletta* moved gently ahead up the faintly starlit channel.

The yacht made her enemy no farewell

signal as she departed. Trailing her dinghy, flecking flashes of phosphorus in the inky waters, the pirate schooner steadily proceeded.

Her port light glowered like a danger signal in the night, then faded and died as she swung slowly eastward. Silent, wraithlike, the sinister vessel was gone.

Alone at the grim island—alone with Don T. and the guards he now, with sundry oaths and kicks, was wakening—the Vagabond lay somnolently moored at the decaying wharf. Peace descended on Garden Key, and seemed to lie abroad upon the waters of the Gulf, to spread its benediction over the departing Estrella.

The Spanish, however, have a proverb that we have most to fear from fortune when we hold the largest handful of her. And soon events were destined for the schooner that—but let us wait and see.

The doomed vessel had not proceeded more than three miles on her way to Miami and the million dollars when a vague, dark shadow appeared up over her square stern. This shadow remained a moment silent, observant.

Perhaps seven feet away from it, the dim figure of Gonzales made a pale gray patch in the darkness, eerily adumbrated by the faint gleam of the binnacle lamp. Voices sounded from the cabin. Somewhere forward a guitar was strumming, and an occasional fitful snatch of song drifted down wind.

The observant shadow at the stern remained another minute motionless, then slightly moved. It raised a vague, cylindrical object and silently tipped it. Amid the fumes of gasoline from the leaky drums arose a stronger whiff of vapor.

A tiny snick of blue flame punctured the obscurity. Suddenly, with a whiff and gush, swift fire ran all along the counter. As this fire leaped aloft, the dark shadow sank behind the stern and vanished.

"*Dios mio!*" Gonzales howled. He dropped the wheel with lurid curses.

Away from the schooner's stern drifted the dinghy, its painter neatly severed by a knife slash. Submerged, all save its head, the dark and unseen figure of a man in a bathing suit clung at the gunwale.

Dinghy and man, alike, lagged out of the circle of dancing light from the now merrily blazing schooner. They faded into unfathomable darkness.

With frantic yells of "*Caramba!*" and

appeals to assorted saints, Gonzales stamped at runnels of flame. He made an odd, dancing, luminous figure in the night.

Blaspheming pirates tumbled up from the cabin. They jostled and jammed one another in the companionway as they fought for exit.

Scorched, terrified, they staggered forward, colliding with others who came running aft. Spanish shriekings made a babel.

"Thousand demons!" "What is this?" "Who threw fire in the leakage?" "Smoking near the drums?" "Water, water!" "Fire, fire!" "*Válgame Dios!*"

Panic-stricken, distraught, they all tried different tactics. Some, snatching tarpaulin, sought to flog out the swiftly mounting flames. Others, heaving water from draw buckets, only spread the devastation. Still others, yelling that all was lost, commended themselves to Heaven and fled to the bows.

Above the panic, Gonzales bellowed:

"Away from here, idiots! The drums—explode! Save yourselves—away!"

He, alone of all, kept any semblance of self-control. With shouts and oaths, kicks, beatings, he herded his men forward. And none too soon. Hardly had he driven them amidships when, with a dazing, sky-splitting roar, a steel drum exploded.

Night opened wide in a thunderous hell of flame. A volcano belched. Blazing gas gushed like giants' fireworks. The aft bulkhead of the fish well was stove in and shattered, as the schooner's whole stern flew splintered to matchwood.

On the instant the entire mainsail blossomed into one glorious and stupendous bouquet of incandescence. It roared aloft with exultant tongues that licked the mast. Fiery rags of canvas fluttered, dropped in spirals, hissed into the sparkling sea.

Huddled far forward, the panicky crew yelled curses, prayers, appeals for help that could not come. Gonzales, white with rage, dealt formidable blows.

"Fools! Idiots!" he bawled. "She's sinking by the stern! She cannot all burn up—the sea will put her out!"

"Sinking, sinking! *Todos santos!*" wailed terrified cries. "We are all dead men! *Socorro!* The boat—the boat!"

"Impossible!" Gonzales roared fiercely. "Astern, there—no man can go! But the schooner—she cannot sink far. It is shoal water. *Silencio*, idiots! You cannot drown!"

His reassurances sounded absurd in face of that catastrophic belch of flame now devouring all the stern. Yet, he managed to kick and beat some tag-end of discipline into the terror-smitten crew. And there they all crouched on the fo'c's'le, while main and foresails burned to rags.

Main and foremasts flared up, torch-like; fell like blazing pines in a forest fire. Their burning length plunged overboard into the sea. Under drifting white vapors the surface veiled itself—vapor that faded away into impenetrable obscurity beyond the livid circle of light.

Lower, lower still, sank the *goelletta* by the stern. The sea gained steadily there, canting her at a sharp and ever-increasing angle. The weight of her engine, aft, helped bear her down. As the stern sank the bow rose; and up along the steep and firelit decks the waters gurgled.

Then, with a hiss and smoke of extinguished fires, with a sudden swirl and suction, the Star of the Sea forever set. Down she went with a rush. But not far.

All at once she stopped short, never to go again—like grandfather's clock. Her shattered stern rested on the coral bottom. Dismasted, ravaged, she remained there at a crazy tilt, with only her jibboom out of water.

To that jibboom and to the bobstays clung Gonzales and his fourteen men. There they clustered like rats, in the lovely starlit tropic night now darkening as the last flames glowered and died.

Yells, oaths, supplications drifted down wind. But if there were any ears to hear, no answer came.

Thus died the Estrella, sitting on her tail with her nose in air, a wreck as sorry as the wrecks of hope of all her pirate crew.

Back on the island, at the first gush of far-off flame, Don Tiburón—he had been lounging on the causeway, pondering his prospective wealth—started to his feet with a blasphemy. Then, as the fire, distant but vivid, swept aloft, he ran at furious speed along the wharf.

Pausing not even to notice his now once more somnolent guards, he leaped aboard the Vagabond. He hurled himself to the door of Captain Matt's cabin. That door stood ajar on a brass hook. Don Tiburón's kick burst the brass and slammed the door against the cabin bulkhead.

"Capitan!" he shouted. "Up, up! To the rescue, quick!"

"What the hell?" sounded a startled voice. "What—"

"My Estrella—she is burn!"

"What? Well, if she is, I'll give you plenty of gas to pour on her, by gumbo!"

"Turn out! Your motor launch—she must go to the rescue!"

An electric button snicked. The cabin blazed with light.

"Hello, don!" Matt cheerily exclaimed.

"Let her burn, say I. And—here, don't shoot!" as Don T. thrust a revolver almost into his ribs. "Sure I'll turn the crew out! Launch and everything—but don't shoot!"

The yacht's crew had never yet been routed out so speedily. Never had her motor launch been so swiftly swung on-board and down, as now, under the menace of the pirate's gun, backed by those of the zealous guards.

Amid a chorus of questions, exclamations, and rejoicings from the passengers in sketchy attire along the rail, Captain Matt, two of the yacht's crew, and Don T. shoved off. With a rapid stuttering of its underwater exhaust, the launch gathered speed, swept up the channel, vanished in the night.

"How perfectly corking!" Judith cried, wrapping a silk kimono more tightly around her lithe person. Beryl uttered disconnected sounds of joy.

The banker, as he peered at the faint and distant gleam of the conflagration, swore most jovially. And the professor, in a cotton nightshirt, and with a knitted shawl about his thin shoulders, undertook to calculate the exact distance of the catastrophe, both in feet and meters.

Only Roger Hull and Mrs. Saltmarsh were absent. The professor stated that his Angelina had taken a sleeping powder, and that nothing short of Gabriel's trump would wake her.

"But where," Judith asked—"where in the world is Roger?"

"You mean Mr. Hull, my child!" the banker corrected.

"I mean Roger! He oughtn't to miss this perfectly thrilling show. I'll get him!"

Running below, she pounded at the door of Hull's stateroom. No answer coming, she ventured to peek in. A moment, and she was back on deck once more, wide-eyed.

"He—he's gone!"

"Gone, my child? Where to?"

"As if I knew! Find him, somebody! Do something, quick!"

"Sh-h-h!" Minot commanded, with a gleam of inspiration. "If he's gone, he'll come back. But this is amazing! It certainly gets me!"

"What d'you mean, dad?"

"I have my own suspicions as to that young man's absence."

"Oh, you don't think he's hurt, do you?"

"No, but I think he will be if any of the pirates here find out he's not in our midst."

"But, dad, we've got to—"

"We've got to do nothing but keep mum!" the banker insisted. "It's damned lucky that Don Tiburón—the only one of 'em that understands English—isn't here now. Those fool guards on the wharf don't know a word of it. We simply must not let on, by any sign, that Mr. Hull isn't here!"

"But suppose something terrible has happened to Roger?"

"What's the idea, Judy? Looks to me like you were mighty interested in that young man! But calm yourself, my child. Nothing ever happens to freckled young men of that type. He'll be back, safe and sound, before morning. And mum's the word!"

The motor launch returned in due time, with Gonzales and all the shipwrecked pirates. But before the launch came back and discharged its cursing cargo on the beach, other events occurred.

A brisk young man in a bathing suit rowed a dinghy through the night toward Sand Key, which lies just across the channel from Fort Jefferson. He came from the direction of the schooner.

In the dinghy with this wide-awake person was a thermos bottle that had a stout cord hitched to its neck. This bottle smelled strongly of gasoline—the very same kind used in the Vagabond's engines.

Around the young man's waist a sailor's sheath knife was belted. On the thwart beside him, as he rowed, lay a water-tight metal match box. This box bore slight marks where the young man's teeth had only a little while before tightly gripped it.

Pondering as he approached Sand Key, the young man stopped rowing. He filled the thermos bottle with sea water and let

it sink. Then he tossed the match box overboard, drove the dinghy ashore, and dragged it up into the bay cedar bushes, out of sight from the sea.

Thereafter he walked across the key to the fort channel, silently waded out, and swam toward the yacht.

That yacht now was once more dark. Everybody seemed asleep aboard her, there under the shadow of those mighty fortress walls.

But everybody was not asleep. At least one of the passengers was keeping vigil—a vigil betrayed by the slight waxing and waning glow of a cigarette tip on the after deck.

Without a sound, the swimmer approached the Vagabond. No one saw him. Hardly more than drifting—quite indifferent to the ever present peril of sharks—he idled toward the yacht. He had almost reached the vessel's offshore side, when suddenly:

"Who's that?" a feminine voice whispered from the after deck.

"Sh-h-h-h!" a cautioning murmur came from the waters.

The cigarette glow made a parabola through darkness as it was flipped overboard. Wise to the caution given, the waiting passenger breathed no further word.

In utter stillness the swimmer reached a fender, paused there a moment, then muscularly drew himself up and over the dark rail. Dripping, he sank to hands and knees, crawling toward the companionway.

"Roger!" Judith whispered. "Is that you?"

"Sh-h-h-h!" he answered, in a ghost of sound. "Open the companionway, quick!"

She obeyed. All below was darkness. Down into that darkness Roger Hull invisibly descended.

The girl, her heart behaving queerly, followed. She closed the companionway, and heard the breathing of a man just come from considerable exertion.

"Are you hurt?" she murmured.

"No, but I shall be if any of the guards find out I've been away! Did Don T. go after his gang in the motor launch?"

"Yes! And—"

"I thought so. I could see it was gone. So they're not back yet? Fine!"

Silence a moment. That colloquy in utter darkness held a strange, mystic quality that perfectly entranced Judith. She

wanted to say something sublime, poetic, such as greeted *Leander* after his record breaking swim of the Hellespont. But all she found to utter, in whispered tones, was this:

"Sure you're not hurt?"

"No. But there are pleasanter places to hang on than a schooner's rudder chains!"

All at once Hull felt questing hands, feminine hands, that touched his bare, wet arm. The hands clung. Dog-tired as he was, he got a lot of "kick" from that clinging.

"My hero!" Judith whispered. "How perfectly thrilling! You burned the schooner, didn't you? Oh, my hero!"

"Forget it, Judy! I'd rather be a real pirate!"

"But, Roger, aren't you one?"

"If I was—"

"What then?"

"Pirates steal things." Hull's voice shook a little. "If I was a pirate I'd steal something!"

"What 'd you steal?"

"Damn it, a kiss!"

"Oh, but you couldn't, Roger! Nobody can steal a thing from anybody that's just crazy to give it to 'em!"

"Where the devil *are* you, Judy?"

"Here—right here, you stupid old thing!"

Judith's silk kimono became suddenly wet and wrinkled as Roger Hull collected his booty. The *smack* of it sounded surprisingly loud in that dark stillness.

As Judith broke from the clinch, and Hull groped rather tremblingly to his state-room, he, too, thought this moment perfectly thrilling.

IX

ROSY-FINGERED dawn, according to the best poetic usage, had barely begun to paint the portals of the east when Don Tiburón, Gonzales, and two of the sub-pirates—all four of them very visibly armed—came aboard and summarily routed out Captain Matt Herriland.

"Well, what the devil do you Spigs want now?" the captain angrily demanded, tousled and in delicate lavender pyjamas that ill became a sea dog. "Aren't you ever going to let me get a wink of sleep?"

"This is no time for the esleep!" Don T. retorted. He looked worn and anxious, the don did. His mustache was uncombed,

his hair unslicked with oil. Perhaps the lack of his morning *cafe solo* and of a shave had something to do with his distinct falling off in morale.

Then, too, the loss of his schooner was a contributing factor. His tone held a certain peevish accent as he continued:

"This time for the business, now, not for the esleep. We have come for esupplying ourselves."

"What?"

"For coffee, food, and many things. Very quick, also!"

"The hell you say!" Captain Matt retorted. "So you reckon we're going to feed you, too, as well as stand for a hold-up? You go chase yourself around the island a couple of times!"

Don Tiburón smiled unpleasantly.

"If you will do me the honor to look from your window," he replied, "you will observe a machine gun which is mount at the door of the fort. That gun command the yacht. Also, turn your eye on my revolver. We have a proverb that it is pleasant to command, if only a flock of sheep. I may add—or *Americanos*. I command here, capitan. You obey!"

"You win, of course," Captain Matt conceded, his jaw hard. "Any fool can win with arguments like yours!"

"Of an assurance we win, but not because we are fools," the don laughed. "Ah, no! It is because we have the superior grand intelligence. Will you supply us?"

"All right—*mañana!*"

"*Mañana* will not do. It must be at once! You must order all kind of supplies put on the wharf immediately. Especial, coffee and tobacco. And remember you of it, no poisoning in the food. Your Señor Van Kleek, he shall eat and drink sample of all things before we do. So, if he fall sick, you all die—from the poisoning of the lead! You understand?"

"If I didn't I'd be more of a lunkhead than even you are! You win. You hold all the trumps, you ginger-colored wop. But I hope to God you all choke to death eating our grub."

In less than an hour something like half of the Vagabond's stores were broken out from below by the sullen and dejected yacht's crew and dumped on the wharf. Captain Matt and Mate Johansen glumly supervised the job.

During this time, Langdon Minot, Judith, and Roger Hull came on deck. The

banker looked very sour, but Judith was all smiles; and as for Hull—fresh shaven and alert—he seemed to view the proceedings with an air of complete enjoyment.

The girl and he said little to each other. What they did say, however, appeared to give them considerable satisfaction as the work of unloading proceeded.

Even this work did not satisfy Don Tiburón. He made the captain order the yacht's men to carry everything to the bombproof shelter under the coal shed, where the unfortunate Van Kleek still lay in probably the vilest kind of durance. The sailors had perforce to obey, laboring under close guard, and with many remarks which would have scandalized even the most liberal of censors.

"Much good it 'll do you, though, you third-rate stick-up men!" the banker sneered at Don T., over the rail. Minot's blue eyes held a gleam of fire; his rubicund face looked as if the inward pressure might at any moment explode it.

He blew vindictive smoke from a fat cigar, and added: "We're still ahead of the game. We've got our vessel, and you've lost yours, and no way to send for the money, now. A fine, healthy bunch of pirates you are—burning up your own schooner! What you need is a bunch of nursemaids to wheel you round in baby carriages!"

"It is true," Don Tiburón replied, "that the inexcusable carelessness of one of our men has lose us the *Estrella*. But I have made inquiries as to whom was esmoking on the after deck, and though he have deny his guilt, he have pay for it already. Also, a schooner is only a schooner. And we still hold something of far more great value—you, *señor*, and your party!"

"What d'you mean, don, that the guilty man has paid his debt?" Hull asked, with a pleased accent. "You haven't bumped him off, have you?"

"Bumped? Bumped?"

"I mean sent him over the divide. Shot him, to put it in words of one syllable."

Don Tiburón only shrugged.

"I was waked up by a shot about three this morning," Hull said. "If that was it, you're a fast worker. My congratulations, don! Let the good work go on. The more pirates you pass the raspberries to, the better."

"Oh, an execution?" Judith shuddered. "How exciting!"

"Well, I hope you planted him where he dropped," Hull commented. "That's one pirate that's faded out of the picture, anyhow. You birds are rather in the soup, I should say. I reckon there are about twenty of you now. We've got something like as many. In probably five days the grub will blow up and we'll all have a flat tire, so what's the answer?"

"I do not wholly grasp your significance," the don replied, "but you seem to speak of the starvation. *Muy bien!*" The pirate's eye darkened. "Then you and yours will starve first. But, ah! Long before those five days we shall have the money and a new schooner, and depart for—other places."

"So?" Hull laughed. "You've got things all lined out, haven't you? You're a regular ring-tailed optimist, I'll say!"

"Better than to be an optimist, I can make obedience. And now I have surprise for you all. You shall give me the motor launch, with two men to operate it, put on supplies, write me the new papers again, and the trip to Miami shall be once more undertake!"

"What?" the banker demanded. "You robbers are going to take my launch?"

"It is as I have said, *señor!*" the don asserted, bowing low.

Minot stared and reddened still more. Hull, lighting a cigarette, turned his back to the rail as if to protect the match flame from the morning breeze. He whispered to Captain Herriland:

"Tell him the launch is out of kilter!"

"How the devil are you going to navigate the launch to Miami," Herriland demanded, "when she's out of kilter?"

"Kilter?" the pirate asked. "What is kilter?"

"She's on the blink, fritz, pig, and bum," Hull explained, turning back to the rail with a jovial expression. "Otherwise, *no anda, sabe?* She doesn't run."

"Ah, so? Well, you must then—what you say?—reparate her at once. How long will that be necessary to reparate?"

"To shoot you the straight dope," Hull thoughtfully judged, "her dingbat is out of line, the woozler's loose, three jiggers will have to be filed down, and a new thingumbob installed. So we'll have the job on our lily-white hands for at least half a day. Maybe more."

Don Tiburón nodded as he made reply:

"What matter? There is always a *ma-*

ñana coming. Only," and he looked ominous, "be sure the reparations are well made. Two of your mechanics go with us, and if the engine fail, they die—like-wise the Señor Van Kleek."

"That's the story, of course," Hull cheerfully assented. "You are high class, from take to finish, when it comes to sending folks to glory. But you'll get the launch, O K, and the new set of orders, too."

"And no deception in those orders, *señor!*"

"For the love of Pete! Who's trying to deceive you?" Hull's expression became angelic. "I'm honest, anyhow, even if you aren't! I'm as level as a June horizon at sea. All our cards are on the table, faces up."

"It is well," the don approved. "The more so as I shall myself present those orders in Miami. Lieutenants, underlings, bah! The errors, always the errors!"

He made a gesture of disgust. "The man who sows on the sand does not reap fish. That is our proverb. One must do things, oneself!"

"Right as rabbits, don. Meanwhile, till the launch is done, how about our going ashore?"

"As you all desire, *señor*. Only, you will be guarded. At the least attempt to signalize the lighthouse on Loggerhead, or any vessel that may pass—"

"We'll be buried where we fall?"

"Exactly, *señor!*" Don Tiburón assented, and, with another truly Castilian bow, took his departure to supervise the stowing of the supplies commandeered from the Vagabond.

Breakfast aboard was enlivened by colorful discussion of prospects for all hands, including Van Kleek's chances of survival, and by certain ocular telegraphy between Judith and Hull. The meal over, and tobacco burning, Hull sought a few words in private with Captain Matt.

The captain listened awhile, with dubious shakings of the head, but finally Hull carried his point.

"It can be done, can't it?" he insisted. "When you get right down to cases, it can be done?"

"Well, I reckon so. But it'll be taking all-fired long chances," the captain judged. "You know what that guinea said—if anything went wrong with the engine, he'd

butcher up the two men with him in the launch, to say nothing of Mr. Van Kleek."

"Yes, but pin this in your lid, cap'n; it's not the engine at all I'm talking about. There's no way in the world he can connect us up with this ritzy little idea, is there, now?"

"We-e-ell, no. But—still. I reckon it'll be all right. By the jumping amber-jacks, what a fellow for schemes you are!"

"Pshaw, no! Nothing to this! Any kindergarten pupil could have thought of it, cap'n. Put Engineer Hammerslow hep to it right away. Shoot the good work along."

Thereafter Hull retired to his stateroom to write out a new set of orders for Don Tiburón. After this he got certain materials from the yacht's stores, and borrowed likewise a file and a pair of pliers. He worked secretly for perhaps an hour, then nonchalantly returned to the rest of the passengers on deck.

"Well," he queried, "how about tuning in on a little hike ashore? No percentage in sticking round the yacht when there's so much to be seen at the fort. Who's going?"

"Not me!" the banker declared. "I got held up once in there. Held up and wound up. All bound round with a woolen string. My boat, book, 'baccy, and bottle—that's good enough for me. And I'd rather you wouldn't go either, Judy."

"As if that mattered!" the girl laughed. "Don't be an old silly. If I was afraid, I wouldn't be your daughter!"

"Oh, well, if you put it that way—" the banker conceded, deeply flattered. "But be reasonably cautious."

"I'll be a turtle for speed about running into danger, dad. And, Beryl, old dear, you're coming along?"

"Not on your complexion, I'm not! Once is enough for mine. No more dungeons for me!"

"All right, stick around this poky old boat, if you want to. We're going anyhow, Roger and I."

"Oh, Roger and you!" Beryl retorted. "Well, you'll be well chaperoned for once, with an armed guard right behind you. There won't be much necking."

"You're another; I don't!" Judith exclaimed. "It's more than you could say, if you ever got the chance!"

For a moment storms threatened, but Hull poured oil on the troubled waters by

pointing his large, high speed camera at them and proposing a snapshot of a ladies' welterweight bout. Then, as Professor Saltmarsh appeared with a large tin botanizing case, followed by his Angelina and the parasol, the shore party was ready to proceed.

"Though, do you think you really ought to risk it, Alcibiades?" the lady anxiously inquired. "Suppose there should be another bombardment? Your poor nerves would never stand the strain. They're so weak!"

"Nothing, not even a bombardment similar to that of Alexandria, July eleventh, of the year eighteen hundred and eighty-two, shall prevent me from gathering specimens of the flora, the small fauna, possibly the conchology of this truly unique island," the professor insisted. He blinked with unusual determination behind his colored goggles. "I wish to be reasonably cautious, Angelina, but on this point I shall remain immovable! And in the event of—"

"Oh, come on, Roger!" Judith interrupted. And the two, once on the wharf, struck off at a good pace with their camera, going toward the sally port. One Eye, the guard, belted his gun a little tighter and followed them nonchalantly with ragged and barefoot disreputability.

As they reached the sally port, Hull stopped to give a cordial "*Buenos días!*" to the man in charge of the machine gun there. This man, a cigarette dangling from his lip, arose from the box of ammunition on which he had been lounging, and touched his little Basque cap to Judith.

"It is a good job you have here," Hull remarked in Spanish, his shrewd gray eye—not coldly calculating—noting the exact position of the gun and the box, also the belt of cartridges that hung at the breech, ready for instant business. "You most surely have a good aim at the yacht. If we started any rebellion, you could blow us out of the water, *verdad?*"

"The señor has reason," the guard cheerfully assented. "But you know where the shoes pinches you, and you will not commit the suicide."

"I should say not!" Hull laughed. "We don't want to be buried where we fall—not on your life!"

Whereupon he gave the man a friendly farewell, and, with Judith, proceeded through the sally port. There they waited

a moment for the professor, Angelina, and the parasol to join them. The Saltmarshes had also their own private guard, the formidable Pablo.

"Ah, professor," Hull smiled, "it may be that I have certain information about this fort, which I have already visited, that may interest you?"

"It may be," the professor conceded. "Even a squirrel can play about the sides of a mountain."

"Eh? Oh—oh, yes, I see. Well, suppose I speak in Spanish, which you understand so thoroughly? Our guards may like to learn something. I always aim to instruct as well as amuse."

"Yes, but how about me?" Judith put in. "I don't know a word of Spanish!"

The look Hull gave her silenced her complaint.

"Proceed, young man," the professor directed, with notebook and pencil ready, while Angelina held the parasol over him.

"To begin with," Hull commenced, in very fair Castilian, "thousands of Americans have died here of yellow fever. The sand down by the coal shed is literally filled with skeletons. Their ghosts haunt the place—don't interrupt, professor—and have been seen by many persons."

"Over there," Hull pointed, "is the famous mystery grave. No one knows who is buried there, but flowers always lie on the grave. See some there now, in earthen pots? They say a murdered woman lies there, and that her ghost walks every night, demanding vengeance."

"*Caracoles!*" One Eye murmured, crossing his fingers. "Americano ghosts, eh?"

"*Que va!*" the other mocked, but his glance was troubled.

"That long, low brick structure over there," Hull continued, "is the incinerator where the yellow fever victims were burned—some of them still alive. Their ghosts are particularly vengeful."

"It looks to me," the professor said in English, "remarkably like a simple hot-shot oven."

"And over there," Hull continued, still in Spanish, "is the execution wall, where many innocent men have been shot. See the bullet holes in the brickwork? Their ghosts nightly haunt the fortress, seeking revenge!"

"*Virgin santa!*" one guard muttered. The other, with a hand that trembled, rolled a cigarette.

"American ghosts are peculiar," Hull explained in Castilian. "Some are short, and some are very tall, even up to twelve feet. Others can make themselves both tall and short. They are luminous, professor, and terribly dangerous—the worst kind. The wretch who sees one and refuses to obey its commands, surely dies in the most horrible agony and goes straight to the inferno!"

"Young man, I am disgusted!" the professor snapped, banging his notebook shut. "I attempted to deceive myself into thinking you might possibly be a serious minded person, at times, with some information of value. But now I perceive, sir, you are wholly frivolous and absurd! Good day, sir!"

"Traditions are always valuable, professor," Hull smiled, as the scandalized Saltmarsh, Angelina, and the parasol departed across the parade ground.

"Come, Alcibiades, let us botanize!" Angelina exclaimed. And, followed by their guard, they proceeded to study the flora.

"Well, Judith," Hull remarked, "shall we be on our way? I reckon the whistle's blown for my lecture. The old boy seems to think my apple sauce is sour. By the way, stand there, will you?" He pointed at a spot close by the sally port. "I want to get a snapshot of you there. Fine background!"

"Isn't Angelina a scream?" Judith laughed, as she posed. "Makes me think of an elephant, the way she trumpets, throws straw all over her back, and marches off with her trunk up!"

"Hold it!" Hull cautioned, and snapped the camera, while One Eye watched with languid interest. "Fine background, and a far finer subject. Beautiful—exquisite!"

"None but the brave deserve the fair. If you think I qualify; I *know* you do!"

"Thanks for the few kind words and the nectarine. But—hello! That's the last shot in my camera. Got to load her up again."

He took a roll of film from his pocket, showed it to the guard, and, in Spanish, politely requested the honor of the guard's permission to reload in the dark casemate. One Eye nodded. Surely he need not follow this Americano on so trivial an errand as just reloading a picture box!

"Wait for me here, Judith. Back in three minutes," Hull said.

He disappeared into the casemate, where he was now totally unobserved, and swiftly opened his carrying case for the camera. From its interior he extracted something not usually found in carrying cases—something tightly wrapped and tied.

This something he immediately bestowed in a dark corner, and covered it with loose bricks, over which he hastily sprinkled lime and rubbish. He also placed one special brick—sound and square cornered and heavy—close beside his cache.

A rat slunk along the gun emplacement, gray and furtive. Hull gave no heed.

"There, and there, and *there!*" he murmured, pointing out to himself three identifying spots in regard to the hiding place. Then he loaded his camera with film, and presently emerged from the casemate, smiling in a spacious and freckled manner.

"All set?" Judy asked.

"Rarin' to go," he answered. "I reckon we're not much sold on poking round the interior of the fort, any more. What say we take a little joy walk round the outside?"

"Any old place at all—with *you!*"

"Ditto, ditto. That's two of a kind."

As they left the fort, Hull carefully counted his footsteps from the inner end of the sally port to the exact position of the machine gun. Each step, he knew, was twenty-six inches.

They crossed the moat and, turning to the left—with their guard trailing them—wandered along the weed-grown margin of the outer moat wall. Presently Hull paused, pointing.

"See those big iron pipes?" he broke in on their small talk conversation.

"Uh-huh! What are they?"

"Sea runs into the moat through 'em at high tide, and drains out at low. Tide's coming in now. Nine o'clock. It's about three-quarters high, so the mouths of the pipes are under water where they run into the moat." He glanced out along the pipes, huge and black, as they slanted across the beach and plunged into the sea. "Reckon they're about two and a half feet in diameter."

"You know everything, don't you, Roger?"

"Not on your life! I don't know any anti-skid to keep me from falling in love!"

"Do you want to?"

"Even if I did, I've got just as much chance as a snail on a speedway!"

As he answered, he was bending over the moat wall, looking down at the entrance of one of the big pipes. Under the insurging water though it was, he could see it, and the sight appeared to satisfy him. "Let's be toddling, Judith!"

He helped her over a kind of sluice gate above the pipes, and they walked along the wall, some five feet thick and with brick faces, between which lay a grout of coral and cement. As they turned the corner by the northeast bastion, a blue heron arose from the fort and flapped away.

Out in the channel, floating among patches of yellow gulf weed, a huge sea turtle lazed in the sunlight. All appeared peaceful and deserted; but the guard, closing up his distance a little, ever kept his one watchful eye on them.

Now, talking lightly of such trifles as lovers the world over always find diverting, they walked along the moat wall toward the west. This wall plunged down directly into the sea. Here and there, undermined, great sections of the facing had caved outward, and now lay under water.

Exposed to long ocean swells that built into surf as the water shoaled, the wall gleamed wet with bursts of upshooting spray. Judith laughed as, watching chances, they ran forward between these deluges.

"What a lark!" she exclaimed, her sun-browned face alive with enthusiasm. "How perfectly thrilling! I wouldn't have missed this for worlds!"

"Same here," he answered. "It means a lot to me—more than I could possibly dare to tell you now."

"Oh, go on, Roger—tell me!"

"No, not just yet. It means too awfully much for me to spill it now, Judy; this hike does."

That it indeed meant enormously much to Hull—this jaunt around the fortress walls—seemed evidenced by his sharp glances as they proceeded. Nothing escaped his gray, shrewd eyes.

He noted the distance traveled from the northeast corner, the depth of the moat, height of the gun embrasures above the water therein; also the coral sand at the bottom, where hurricanes had washed it over the wall, and in places partly filled the moat. But all the time he kept up banter and repartee with Judith, and even threw back an occasional amicable word at the trailing pirate.

Thus they reached the western side of the fortress. Along this they walked the wall; and eventually turning eastward, approached the wreckage of the coaling station where the unhappy Van Kleek still lay imprisoned and invisible.

Three or four guards lounged in the sunshine near what appeared to be the entrance to this subterranean lair; but Don Tiburón himself was nowhere to be seen.

For a few minutes Hull stood with Judith, who chattered about poor Van. Hull, however, seemed abstracted, and gave answer only in monosyllables.

His eye now sought the sally port, now reverted to the coaling station. But, as they once more started back toward the Vagabond, whatever it was he might have been pondering, he gave the girl no hint.

"What are you smiling at?" she asked, a trifle petulantly. "A penny for your thoughts, old groucho!"

"Tune out!" he jested. "They may be worth a lot more than that. You've got to offer at least—"

"Well, how much?"

"A million, Judy."

X

BACK on the yacht, they found Engineer Hammerslow, with his assistant, busily at work overhauling the launch. That the launch did not in the least need overhauling, to make her run properly, mattered nothing. Other things can be done to a launch than to make her run properly.

The professor soon appeared with his Angelina and the parasol, likewise the large tin botanizing case filled with specimens about which he insisted on lecturing for a good while; but at last the arrival of Don Tiburón, with four armed pirates, cut him short.

"All set, don," Hull smilingly informed him at the rail. "We've just got her tuned up right. You can put a feather in your cap and blow away any time now. When do you want to burn up the road?"

"Road, road? Ah, you mean depart? At once, *señor*. The papers—are they prepare for me?"

"The papers are certainly prepare, friend. Give me the papers, or I'll tear up the child!"

"You say? What child?"

"Never mind, don. Just a little Americanism. I'll get 'em for you. Come aboard, that's a good old scout."

"You've got a healthy nerve, Hull!" Minot growled around his weed. "Inviting pirates aboard my yacht!"

"Of course he's got a healthy nerve, dad!" Judith declared. "If you only knew how much!"

"Let us lose no time in the arguings," Don T. observed, as he and his minions boarded the Vagabond. "Provisions, water, oil, gasoline—all ready?" Carefully he examined the launch. "And the engine, she is now perfect? It is well. Remember, if anything in the engine fail—"

"It 'll be buried where it fails," Hull interrupted dryly.

"You jest, *señor*," the pirate severely observed. "But recall our Espanish proverb, that if the pitcher strike the stone, or the stone strike the pitcher, it is always bad for the pitcher. And I—I am the stone!"

"If you're a stone, old top, look out you don't fall overboard," Hull advised. "Now I'll get the papers, and you're off—'way off!"

He went below, and presently returned with a large envelope which he handed to the don, who read the inclosures carefully. The Spaniard nodded approval and pocketed the documents.

"So, then," he judged, "all is readiness. *Vamos!*"

"*Vamos* is right, don. And be sure to bring the million back with you, for money talks, and we want it to say: 'Hit the pike!'"

"Pike, *señor*?"

"I mean we want to step on it, make tracks, blow, beat it, fade—you know what I mean!"

"Alas, no. It is—what you say?—one too numerical for me. But the million, I shall bring it, or the consequences shall to you be of the most unpleasantness, and—"

Orders from Mate Johansen interrupted him, as he had the launch swung outboard and lowered. Into it descended Engineer Hammerslow himself, and a seaman named Benton. Married men, both of them, they could look death in the eye with steadier vision than bachelors.

"Now, then, don, you're next!" Hull directed. "Fine!" he applauded, as Don T. straddled the rail and jumped down, followed by his satellites. "Not very dignified for a first-class pirate, but good judgment of distance. Don't let anybody in Miami gyp you out of the million."

"Cast off!" Hammerslow directed. "Shove away!"

The launch drifted clear. Its engine stuttered, caught, and began to roar. In a white stern blossom of foam, it surged ahead. Messages echoed back and forth.

"Be sure you get back inside of three days, don!" Hull called. "Remember, we're your guests, and you've got an Espanish proverb that guests and fish don't have much perfume after three days!"

"It shall be my honor to preserve my guests from being like the poor fishes!" the don shouted back, with a gallant bow and a wave of the huge straw hat.

"Atta don!" Hull returned. "*Hasta la vista!*"

And while the swift launch cut her way up the channel, then turned and dwindled to eastward until Sand Key hid her, Hull remained there beside Judith at the rail. He was pensive, but smiling.

Luncheon, soon served, was rather subdued. The fact that three of the Americans—Van Kleek, Hammerslow, and Benton—were now in the pirates' hands, and that the outcome of events still remained only too problematical, put a damper on all spirits.

All, that is, except Judith's and Hull's. Not even the question bluntly propounded by Minot: "Where the devil do we get off, if there's any slip-up about that million?"—not even this could subdue those two blithe hearts.

"Where the devil would we get off if the sun burst and fell down on us?" Hull turned the inquiry. "There's any amount of things you could think of to worry about. But it looks to me, from here, as if we had all our ducks in a row."

"Still, after all," Angelina Saltmarsh anxiously remarked, "it is so extremely uncertain, this matter of obtaining money at a distance. And these banditti seem so crude. They might murder us all in cold blood, and even destroy my husband's botanical and zoological specimens!"

"Not while we've got your parasol to protect us," Hull declared. "So forget it, Mrs. Saltmarsh. Sufficient unto the day is the devil thereof—meaning Don Tiburón himself!"

The sizzling hot afternoon dragged interminably. Short although the time of waiting had already been, it began to op-

press the captives. Action does not exhaust the nerves like inaction. Is not waiting for rescue almost worse than destruction itself?

Nobody wanted to stay aboard the closely guarded yacht, and, on the other hand, none cared to go ashore. It was too hot to start the victrola and dance; and when the wireless had been dismantled, something seemed to have happened to the radio so that nothing but static would come through. The banker played an ill-tempered game of chess with Beryl, who queened six pawns on him and then succeeded in getting only a stalemate, after all.

Angelina insisted on the professor taking a nap with the ice bag on his head, which he didn't in the least want. Captain Matt smoked far more cigars than were good for him, especially as at the same time he kept a discreet quid in his cheek. He also nagged Mate Johansen, who was suffering from prickly heat and an attack of ingrowing temper.

Judith tried to read and improve her mind, but discovered that her mind refused to be improved. Always she found her eyes wandering up to the fortress and the ominous machine gun mounted at the sally port; to the guards; to the few lolling pirates round the coal shed.

Her thoughts, meantime, went even farther afield. She wanted action, she desired speed; and, more than all, she longed for Roger Hull. But Hull had again become invisible. He either remained in his stateroom or down in the engine room, tinkering at something which seemed most particularly private. That he refused to tell her what he was about appeared to Judith a supreme grievance.

"Keeping secrets from me!" she pondered. "The very idea, from *me!* It's kind of thrilling, yes. But still, I wish I knew!"

Judith felt herself immensely intrigued. She was not, however, destined to know what Roger Hull was up to—just yet. Neither was anybody else. For Hull was one of those exceedingly rare young men who, when they have a good idea, refuse to let it slip.

Thus the long, sultry afternoon wore away toward its end; and Hull reappeared, smiling, very deeply intent on fish.

"Let's put our lines over, Mr. Minot," he suggested, "and try our luck, eh?"

But Minot felt no interest in fish, or—for that matter—in anything.

"I should think you'd be thinking about something besides fish, young man!" he severely remarked. "You, with a million at stake!"

"When you come right down to tacks, there's more than a million at stake, Mr. Minot. We're shooting our whole stake. Our lives are involved. That's why I crave some innocent Waltonian diversion. It takes the mind off of things, fishing does. Besides, who knows but we may need the fish for grub? I'll bet you ten smackers, right now, I can land a bigger edible fish than you can!"

"Blah!" the banker retorted. "But you're on!" For Minot vastly prided himself on his skill. "Wait till I get my tackle, and I'll show you!"

He got his tackle, which was rare and costly, lent Hull some, and proceeded to show him—to the tune of a thirty-pound amberjack in less than twenty minutes. Against this, despite all Judith's encouragement, Hull could land nothing but a sixteen-pound grouper. He caught, however, a lively young nurse-shark, which he tossed upon the wharf for the guards.

"*Ola, muchachos!*" he hailed them in Spanish. "Here is a shark for you. It is possible I may catch another and a larger one for you, before long. Thanks, you're welcome!"

He and the banker angled awhile longer, casting over the port rail, but hooked only a few angel-fish and snappers. A barracuda, making off with an expensive artificial bait, finished Minot's interest.

"Even with the ten I get from you," he peevishly complained, "I'm five shy on this game!"

"You shouldn't horn into it with such high-priced apparatus."

"Oh, is that so? The best is none too good for me, young man! Look at this rod, now. Pretty nifty, what?"

"Nifty is right!" Hull admired. "Never saw one exactly like it. Automatic, eh?"

"Yep! Handiest thing I ever had. All the upper sections fit into the lower. Have it any length you like, for close-up work or long distance casting," the banker explained, mopping his fervid brow. "Don't have to stop to unscrew sections or screw 'em on again."

"Fine! Just push that button, and she shoots right out to full fifteen foot length?"

"That's the idea. And push this one, and in she comes. Doesn't that beat the devil?"

"It might, if it got a chance," Hull admitted. "Let's see if I can work her."

Minot let Hull manipulate the new, automatic rod, and throw under Hull's earnest praise. Thus, despite the loss of the fifteen-dollar bait, the *entente cordiale* was restored. Wiser than many in his day and generation, Hull understood the value of interesting himself in a father's personal possessions.

Minot puffed smoke with satisfaction as he put away his gear, and handed Hull a choice weed. The cook busied himself with the fish. For the second time since their arrival at Garden Key, the sun declined back of the frowning battlements, and something like peace—although, perhaps, only the peace of weariness—descended on the Vagabond.

A still deeper peace lay, also, over the fort, the island, and the guards, as midnight stole across the star-dusted zenith.

Once more into that peace slid a dark figure, on some mysterious errand bent. This figure, as the night before, was clad only in a bathing suit. About its waist a sheath knife was belted.

That waist was likewise girt with many turns of small, strong rope, which ended in something made of steel. A metal cylinder and a longish bundle wrapped in canvas lay along the figure's back. This time, however, the metal cylinder was not a thermos bottle, nor did it contain anything like gasoline.

Noiseless as all well conducted wraiths are said to be, the figure slid overboard into the channel, and drifted toward the big iron pipes that filled or drained the moat. It being now midnight, the tide was full high, and the entire pipes from sea to moat lay under water.

In a few minutes, unseen by any eye, the figure reached the pipes, dived, entered one, vanished.

Let this figure no longer remain anonymous. Roger Hull, swimming under water up the pipe, held his breath until the full lung capacity of air he had taken before diving nearly burst him. He had to swim with short arm strokes and cautious kicks, lest he cripple himself by striking the rusty inside of the conduit.

The pipe, he had estimated, was some

hundred and fifty feet long. He knew he could easily swim that far under water, without breathing. The strain in his lungs increased, but confidently he forced his way along.

Once he reached the exit into the moat, all would be well. He had, when walking with Judith, observed that exit, and had seen that it was clear; that nothing blocked it at all.

As soon as he reached the moat, he could come to the surface and breathe again. There he could rest a few minutes in the deep shadow of the moat wall, before proceeding to the next step of his carefully laid campaign.

But now the strain in his lungs became more tense. He let a little air out, and put more muscle into his strokes. The pipe seemed fully twice as long, on the inside, as it had looked from without. But Hull flogged on and on.

"Just a minute, now," he thought, "and—"

Suddenly he stopped short. He stopped, not because he wanted to, but because something checked his way. His hands went out, clutchingly. His fingers gripped hard metal. And, on the instant, he realized he had come right against an iron grille.

For a moment the full significance of this did not dawn on him. Even though he had hold of a grille, he denied its existence.

"There wasn't any grille here when I looked at the pipe!" his thought came confusedly. "There can't be any here!"

Yet there it was, a deadly obstacle; and, instant by instant, the terrific pressure in his lungs augmented. His ears hummed. Pain assailed him, and a sense of horrible, nightmare bafflement.

Then, quite at once, he realized the devastating truth—he *had got into the second pipe!*

Fool that he had been! He had neglected to inspect both pipes. Having seen the first one unobstructed, he had assumed they both were clear. And now—

An agonizing urge to breathe racked his lungs. His muscles twitched and shuddered. Strange fireworks began spinning somewhere in the blackness. He knew himself trapped—trapped by this sinister jest of a malicious fate.

And, for a moment, he remained choking, drowning in the Stygian darkness of the moat pipe.

Back! He must go back! But, even as this flash of thought occurred, he knew he never could go back. The pipe was too small for a man to turn in.

And, even if he could turn, he realized he never could reach the exit to the sea. Before he could get there his agonized lungs must expel the air. He must gulp, take water—lose all self-control—thrash wildly—drown.

A pang of cutting terror assailed Roger Hull. Usually shrewd, cool, self-confident, in this moment of annihilation he knew the meaning and the horror of panic. But for a second he held control of his fast-dying strength and nerve.

His grip tightened on the iron bars. He shook them with the violence of desperation. Did they yield? Again he shook, tugging, straining at the metal. He felt it give, a fraction of an inch—felt the brine-rusted, corroded iron bend.

With the madness of a final passion for life, he hurled his muscular might at the bars. They trembled in their sockets.

Rending, tearing, he labored, with blood pounding in his temples, with lightning flashes shooting through his brain. One bar was bent, was ripped away!

He seized another, wrenched it inward, and—

Suddenly he was free!

Gasping as his head emerged from the black waters, he clung and trembled. Dizzy, sick, shaking as with a chill, he crouched in the shadow, drinking full drafts of air.

Air, air! Oh, God, the blessed boon of air—of life again!

The guard at the machine gun stirred uneasily. He had heard something in the night. A splash, a gurgle.

"*Quien vive?*" he challenged.

No answer came. Only the profound and brooding silence once more infolded fort and island.

"Just a brick falling," he thought. "Or some accursed sting ray. May the devil take them all!"

Then, lighting another cigarette, he relapsed to half somnolent watchfulness of the dim wharf, and the dimmer yacht moored at its flank.

Roger Hull, meantime, was pulling himself together. That was no easy job, after the inferno he had passed through. He had to remain more than ten minutes cling-

ing to the broken grille before he could recover breath and strength, fight down a sickness that sought to overcome him, gather force to push on.

He remained at the grille, therefore, recuperating his shattered powers, reconnoitering the prospect, and making sure he had not been discovered.

Now that he was winning back to strength again, what cared he for the possibility of sting rays' often fatal attacks? Such had to be risked, or perils even more deadly threatened all aboard the yacht—especially Judith. Most especially Judith! And having come thus far on the extraordinary errand he had planned, nothing under heaven would have induced him to return.

"But I was sure taking it all in forward, awhile," he mused. "If I hadn't just managed to knock this pipe grille down, I'd have piped down myself till Gabriel toots!"

Almost entirely recovered, and reasonably sure none of the pirates suspected his presence in the moat, he once more pushed along. Relaxing his hold on the bars, swimming easily in spite of the various weights bound to him, he slid northward in the shadowed darkness of the moat wall. With hardly a ripple, he made way toward the northeast bastion.

The distance might have been two hundred feet. Once he could turn that bastion, into the northern moat, discovery would become improbable. All his efforts, all his ambitions, were centered on reaching that bastion and on turning it.

Only a few minutes were needed to attain the goal, but Hull felt them as so many hours. At last, there he was! The bastion had been doubled. And now the massive tower interposed its salient between him and the guard at the sally port.

"Now I can shoot along faster!" he thought.

Breathing more freely, he swam at greater speed. In five minutes or less he found the water shoaling.

This, he knew, was as it should be. His observations that morning, when on the moat wall with Judith, had told him that just ahead lay a sand fill which reduced the water to a depth of hardly more than three feet.

His feet touched the coral sand. A moment more and he was wading forward, cautiously.

With his position reckoned as best it

might be, he presently stopped and took the metal cylinder from his back. This was Professor Alcibiades Saltmarsh's tin botanizing case, burglarized for the occasion. Hull tore off a strip of adhesive tape that had made it water tight, and produced an electric flash light.

Standing there waist deep in the water, he took a chance on making a little illumination, and shot a pale beam up the immense brick wall of the fortress.

This showed him the location of the particular gun embrasure he had already—while strolling with Judith—chosen for his purpose. Jagged, yawning, it peered out over the moat, at an elevation of some thirty feet.

"Fine!" he approved, mentally. He waded onward a few feet more until he stood directly under the embrasure. Then calmly, but without a moment's hesitation or a single lost motion, he continued his activities.

Extinguishing his flash, he slipped it into the botanizing case, and unwound about sixty feet of the rope around his waist. One end of this rope was knotted to an object he had—to Judith's unsatisfied curiosity—that day constructed in privacy. The object was a five pointed steel grapnel.

He coiled his line loosely, swinging the grapnel in his right hand. With his left, he once more directed a beam of light up at the embrasure. *Zip-zip-zip!* Round and round he spun the grapnel. Then, with all his strength, he cast it upward.

It missed the embrasure by a foot; came splashing down again with a *ker-souse!* startlingly loud in that profound silence. But Hull realized he was now something like a thousand feet from the guard at the sally port, and that massive walls interposed between them. He did not let this splash disturb him in the least.

Again he coiled and cast.

This time the grapnel struck the western edge of the embrasure, ricocheted through, and fell to the floor of the gun emplacement within.

"Atta baby!" he murmured.

Hull dragged his line tight. To his immense satisfaction one of his steel prongs caught the brickwork of the sill.

He tugged, and then put all his weight on the rope. It held. Once more, sliding his flash light back into the tin case, he swarmed up the rope. Hard muscled, lithe, he went up, hand over hand.

In hardly more than two minutes he reached the sill. Dragging himself over it, he scrambled through, and stood panting within the blackness of the casemate.

He paused for only a moment's rest, then pulled up his rope, and with his sheath knife cut off the grapnel. This might have impeded him in the further developments he had planned.

But he carefully placed it close to the embrasure, so that he could find it again in case retreat down the walls became necessary. His mind, it seemed, had dealt with every possibility.

This done, he once more girt himself with the rope. Then he remained a moment silent, motionless, in that thick obscurity. He heard no sound but the drumming of his own pulses in his ears, and the dull and solemn murmur of surf against the outer moat wall. Of human occupancy of the fortress, no slightest indication reached him.

"Hot dog!" Hull thought, smiling in the blackness. "Now for the dirty work!"

XI

ROGER HULL's first move was prosaic. That is to say, he sat down on the floor of the gun emplacement, opened the longish bundle he had carried on his back, and took out part of its contents—a pair of rubber-soled tennis shoes. These he tightly laced on.

"They'll help some!" he reflected. "Plugging round on rubbish, barefoot, makes no hit with me!"

The other article in the longish bundle he thrust into his knife belt. This done, he found himself ready to proceed.

With the infinite caution of an invader to whom discovery means instant death, he crept in the darkness along the casemate toward the northeast bastion. His way was littered with bricks, junk, all manner of debris; but slowly and without a sound he pushed forward.

Now and then, pausing to listen acutely, he reached that bastion. There he turned southward through the east casemate toward the sally port.

Somewhere a rat squeaked and scampered. Softly whickering on membranous wings, a huge bat staggered through an arch of the casemate and out again into the brooding blackness of the parade ground.

Still on and on the invader crept. His accurate sense of location, and the pains-

taking observations he had already made in preparation for his *coup*, brought him in safety, and undiscovered, to the place where that morning he had loaded his camera.

Half by the sense of touch, and seemingly half by instinct, he located the rubbish and bricks he had piled over the thing he had taken out of his camera and hidden. With exquisite care, he recovered his cache and put it into the big tin botanizing case, along with the searchlight. The case hung on his back, by a cord around his neck, and left both arms free for action.

His next move was to locate and pick up the unusually square-cornered, hard and heavy brick he had laid carefully near this spot. With this brick in his sinewy, freckled right hand, he crouched out of the casemate, along a bit of jungly path, and so to the inner end of the sally port.

He stopped here, his ears on the stretch, then ventured to peep out. The outer door of the sally port presented itself as a vague blotch of gray from the sea loom. At the lower side of this blotch, a single red spark glowed—the guard's cigarette.

"Awake, all right," Hull pondered. "It'd have been too much of a lead-pipe cinch if I'd caught him snoring. But he'll be asleep in just a few minutes now, or I've got no sleeping powder in my fist!"

Patiently, brick in hand, he waited. And, as he waited, he recalled certain statistics more useful far than any the professor had accumulated about the fort.

He recalled the exact distance which, by pacing it off while walking with Judith, he had measured from where he now stood to the position of the machine gun.

He hefted his brick, to get the proper feel of it; he reckoned trajectories, and remembered how he had one time struck out eleven men in succession, when pitching for the Junior nine.

The spark of cigarette spiraled away into the moat, and presently a match flamed as the guard struck another.

Hull stepped noiselessly out into the middle of the inner doorway, "wound up," and—for life, liberty, and the pursuit of Judith—let drive.

His eye could not follow that brick in the darkness, but he saw results. He heard a grunt, beheld the swift extinction of the match—then black night swallowed all.

Through the sally port he charged, leaped upon the prostrate guard, and gave

him both fists, right and left, anywhere he could find to hit. But these knock-out blows were needless. In the matters of knock-outs, the brick had easily beaten him to it.

"He fell harder than a ton of the same!" Hull exulted mentally. Silently, but without delay, he dragged the guard by one limp arm back through the sally port and into the fortress. "Now, then, Mr. Fly, here's where Mr. Spider gets busy!"

Unwinding the rope from his waist, he cut proper lengths and tied the guard up securely. He, furthermore, muzzled him with a stick and cord gag which he took from the botanizing case.

"When this baby wakes up, he'll think he's dead!" Roger told himself.

The next move was to confiscate the pirate's revolver and cartridge belt, then haul him to the casemate, through it and to the wooden-sheathed powder magazine. In along the winding and jet-black passageway that led to this prison he snaked the unconscious pirate, and without ceremony dumped him there like a sack of potatoes.

Then, taking his flash light from the tin case, he snicked a beam of radiance into the pirate's face.

"Holy thundering chipmunks!" Hull gulped. "Gonzales! Damn me if it isn't Gonzales!"

He remained a moment, inspecting Don Tiburón's fallen lieutenant. The pirate's jaw was bloody, and he was breathing with stertorous groans, but Hull knew the man would recover.

"He'll live, by the Great Kumquat, to do a good long bit in the pen—if nothing slips before I'm through!" Hull mused.

Elated at this stroke of fortune, but delaying not a second, he crept back to the machine gun. This he silently transported to a gun emplacement in the casemate just south of the sally port.

He planted the gun with its muzzle projecting through an embrasure. From this position it could be swung so as to command both the wharf and causeway to the left, and the ruins of the coal shed to the right.

Another noiseless expedition brought in the box of ammunition, which Hull placed beside the gun and opened. He also assured himself that the belt of cartridges was properly in the gun breech, and, with deft hands, felt over the mechanism. Two sessions of training at R. O. T. C.

camp had familiarized him sufficiently with machine guns.

"So far, it's all to the merry," he reflected. "This is certainly progress—if nothing breaks to crab me!"

He remained a few minutes, pondering, resting. Greatly did he desire a smoke, but even had he possessed cigarettes and matches, he would by no means have risked a light.

"Time enough, later, for smoking—either tobacco on earth, or myself on the hot gridiron down below!"

With his forces now again thoroughly recruited, he once more advanced against the enemy. This time he did not employ methods so primitive as brick heaving. Subtler designs lay in his scheme of attack.

Leaving the fort, he crept noiselessly across the moat, dropped into the sand of the weed-grown stretch, and—a dim specter—crawled on hands and knees among the rank growths toward the coal shed.

He paused occasionally to listen. Thus it took him possibly fifteen minutes to reach the spot he had already carefully chosen for his next operation.

Here, sheltered by weeds, he remained squatting. So far as he could determine, no pirate was on guard outside the coal shed. With Van Kleek a prisoner inside, and with the yacht so thoroughly covered, what possible reason could any of the pirates have for maintaining a sentinel at this lair?

Some of them, however, Hull felt certain, were awake. Playing cards, probably; or discussing what they planned to do with their share of the million. At all events, the faintest possible hair-line crack of light appeared from somewhere amid the tangled steel girders and the concrete blocks of the wrecked shed.

Hull once more took the tin botanizing case, and from it removed the thing he had put into it in the casemate—the thing he had transported from the yacht, inside his camera case.

This thing was a package that, undone, yielded two bed sheets sewed together along one side—narrow ones, from his berth aboard the Vagabond. Taking from his belt the tightly strapped, longish packet, he undid this also.

Now in his hand lay the banker's patent fish rod. He tried it two or three times to make sure it would work, extending and contracting it in the darkness.

"Fine!" he approved. "Here's where we now get into the dons for a little of the psychic stuff!"

He put the tip of the fish rod under the middle of his sheets, and draped the sheets about him so that he remained squatting in a bed sheet tent with the rod for its pole. He held the rod in his good right hand, and in the left took his flash light.

Then, drawing a deep breath, he whistled thrice. Those whistlings closely imitated the note of the *palomita*, the wild wood dove of Cuba.

Hull waited, listening. No sound answered him. He heard only the solemn suspiration of slow waves against the outer moat wall. Presently he whistled again, more loudly.

This time a certain stirring became audible from inside the coal shed. The crack of light widened there, a blurred faint illumination through the tangle of wreckage. A voice guardedly exclaimed:

"*Quien vive?*"

In a sepulchral, carrying moan, Hull answered:

"*Que salga el Americano!*" Which is to say: "Let the American come forth!"

Then, in graveyard tones: "*O se mueren todos!*" That is: "Or all die!"

Forthwith, holding his flash light vertically, he snapped on the current. There among the tall weeds a dimly luminous form appeared. There is nothing better, by way of ghosts, than a flash light under a sheet!

This horrid apparition suddenly shot aloft to a height of nearly fifteen feet. Then swiftly it dropped and vanished in darkness.

"*Que salga el Americano, o se mueren todos!*"

Although the ghost moaned with something of an American accent, nothing unusual lay in that. Who could expect an American ghost to speak absolutely correct Spanish?

A gasped oath in the Cuban dialect drifted to Hull. Something clattered. A door banged shut. Vaguely on the hot night air floated confused chatters of terror.

An argument seemed in progress among the pirates. Voices angrily arose, and bad words floated. Then, suddenly, once again a blur of light trembled among the ruins. Dark shadows moved there.

Once more the ghostly summons arose. Again the luminous specter appeared

among the weeds, arose in air, dropped, and died to blackness.

Voices of anguished and unreasoning terror broke from within the coal shed, with blasphemies, prayers, scraps of supplication. And quite at once another and more familiar voice exclaimed:

"My word! I say, you fellows, what the deuce?"

Protesting, a figure was hurled outward and away. With another chatter of panicky exclamations, a door slammed. The light beneath the coal shed vanished.

"Van Kleeck, this way!" Hull shouted, emerging from his ghost tent. "No questions, you idiot, but run! Run like hell—follow me!"

For once, energized by terror into some semblance of intelligence, Van Kleeck obeyed. As Hull fled toward the sally port, Van picked up his heels and rushed, trembling, after him in the night.

"I say, old chap!" he panted, stumbling.

"What the deuce, and—"

"Shut up, you dumb-bell, and run!"

"Yes, but—"

Van tripped over a wreck timber and sprawled his length in the weeds. He scrambled up with a mouthful of sand, and staggered onward.

"This way!" Hull called, as he escalated the causeway and pelted across the moat.

"Why not—my word—why not to the yacht?"

"You poor damned fish! Do as I say!"

By heaven's own grace, Van Kleeck had wit enough for once to obey. He reached the causeway only a few yards behind Hull. Disregarding the rotted boards that might have dropped them into the moat, both ran toward the sally port.

They were none too soon. For abruptly, with cries from the wharf, revolver shots began to puncture the night. Bullets *ping-pinged* into the massive fortress walls, all about them.

And from the coal shed, too, spattered a ragged fusillade as the pirates there—realizing too late how they had been duped—opened fire at random.

The fugitives, at full drive, spun through the sally port.

"I say! Wait for me!" Van yelled. "Where—where shall we hide? My word, where shall we retreat to?"

"Retreat, hell!" his mentor swore. "We're attacking, now!"

"Attacking?" Van panted. "It's not done, under these—"

"Shut up, and follow me!"

Hull swung to the left and dashed to the machine gun, with Van a bad second.

Then, on the instant, the night opened wide with the infernal crashings of gunfire. In a deafening burst of flame and detonation, whirlwind blasts belched from the embrasure.

First they swept the wharf, along which the two guards, Pablo and One Eye, were charging at the double quick. Pablo silently collapsed. One Eye yelled, spun round, and plunged, splashing, into the moat.

With a laugh, Hull swung his Lewis gun sharply to the right and sprayed the weedy stretch with bullets. There, vague figures with cries of fury were running toward the causeway, firing as they lunged along.

The dark was lanced with spits of flame. Echoes beat a devil's tattoo out across the uncaring sea. Shrieks, howls, execrations, mingled with those echoes.

And now from the yacht, too, shouts were breaking. A sudden twinkle of lights there, and dim moving shadows, told that all hands aboard were waking up.

The pirates in the weedy stretch broke and ran for cover. Some shrieked and fell, twitching in the gloom.

A few, mad with panic, dashed down the beach and into the surf—and wilder yells resounded as their naked feet met the spines of the poisonous black sea-urchins there. These punctured wretches flung themselves back upon the beach, and rolled there, howling.

In less than three minutes the battle was over—almost before it had properly begun.

Hull laughed dryly as he ceased firing. A sudden and amazing silence fell. Save for confused sounds from the Vagabond, an immense and brooding stillness once more arched the night.

"I reckon," Roger remarked; "I reckon we win. Come on, let's go!"

"Go? My word! Where to, now?"

"Back to the yacht, of course, you poor simp! Where d'you think? To the coal shed?" Hull kicked the ammunition. "Pick up that box and follow me!"

Shouldering the Lewis gun, and with Gonzales's revolver in his right hand, Hull departed for the casemate. Van, staggering under the weight of the ammunition box, followed in a trance.

They reached the sally port, issued forth

as conquerers, and advanced along the causeway. Passing the motionless figure of Pablo—who nevermore would be a pirate—they reached the wharf just in time to meet cautiously advancing scouts from the Vagabond.

"What—who—where—how—"

Questions hailed about them, thicker than birdshot. Through all this hurly-burly, Hull caught Judith's voice. He saw her—in silk kimono and with hair loosely tumbled—as she cried from the brightly lighted rail:

"A battle! A machine gun battle and a rescue—how scrumptious! How perfectly thrilling!"

"I shall faint," came Beryl's exclamation. "Oh, I positively shall!"

Into the fringes of light cast by the Vagabond, Hull advanced. A young man with a Lewis gun on his shoulder, and clad only in a bathing suit and rubber-soled shoes, presents somewhat of an odd appearance to unprepared beholders.

"Hull?" the banker shouted, questioningly. Mr. Minot looked odd, too, in pink pyjamas, a smoking jacket, and a pith sun helmet. "What the devil is all this rough-house? I want an explanation!"

"Shut up, everybody!" Hull commanded, and his tone was as Napoleon's. He espied Captain Matt, who at least had on trousers, although donned backward in the excitement. "Here! Have this gun and ammunition taken aboard!"

"Where are all the pirates?" the captain demanded, instinctively clinging to the waistband of his misapplied pantaloons. "Where in hell?"

"Correct!" Hull replied. "On the hot plates already, some of 'em. The rest are out of luck. Their batteries are down, gas tanks empty, and magnetos smashed. "Van!" he ordered that unshaven, haggard, and disheveled wretch, "you go aboard! Cap'n Matt, you come with me!"

"Where to, sir?"

"Back to the fort!"

"No, no!" Angelina Saltmarsh protested, modestly clutching the muffler that was around her canton flannel nighty. "It is far too dangerous, and—"

"Be cautious, young man!" the professor broke in. "You might step on a rusty nail and become infected with *bacillus tetani*!"

"Oh, Roger!" Judith cried. "Let me go, too!"

"Will you all shut up?" Hull inquired, cuttingly. "Here!" He grabbed Captain Matt's arm. "Come along with me! Full speed ahead, too, cap'n!"

In tumults of confusion, the yacht folk carried the Lewis gun and the ammunition aboard. Amid this turmoil, Van Kleek began narrating how he had slugged his guards, escaped, captured the machine gun, and saved Hull by opening fire in the very nick of time. Meanwhile, Roger and Captain Matt returned to the fortress.

Ten minutes later they came back. Between them, they lugged a limp but reviving figure, none other than Gonzales, Don Tiburón's unfortunate lieutenant. They dumped him, still gagged and groaning, most unceremoniously into the fo'c's'le.

"I wish to God we had the rest of the cusses!" the captain fervently remarked. "I'd give a million, if I had it, to round 'em up proper!"

"Why not turn your searchlight on the island?" Hull suggested. "They might come in and surrender."

"By the jumping jingo!" Captain Matt exclaimed. "What a fellow for schemes you are! I'll do it."

"Fine! And have your assistant engineer get your engines going, right away. We're leaving here, *pronto!*"

The searchlight presently leaped into a blinding, sizzling glare. Its beam swept the wharf, moat, and causeway, then picked out vivid details of fortress battlements and embrasures, and swung down to the coal shed.

As if fixed and focused there, a white something waved and flickered. This was a pair of bed sheets, hoisted aloft on a collapsible fish rod.

"Flag of truce, eh?" Hull laughed scornfully. "Will the survivors come in and be good?"

He cupped his hands, shouting:

"*Que vengan todos! Y no se morirán!*"

"I get your general drift," Captain Matt remarked. "If they knuckle under, they'll be spared, hey? You're too damn liberal, sir. If it was me, I'd shoot 'em down like rats."

"Amazing!" Minot ejaculated, his blood pressure going up, up, up. "Surely, we aren't going to take that gang of ruffians aboard! I won't have it, young man. Who's boss here, anyhow?"

"You were, dad!" Judith laughed, dancing with exultation. "But you're not now.

Roger is—*he's* boss! My hero! Oh, how perfectly grand and scrumptious everything has turned out!"

XII

WITH the searchlight blindingly upon them, and facing the muzzle of the machine gun at whose breech stood Roger Hull, two men advanced under their bed sheet flag of truce. They progressed unsteadily along the wharf, followed by a straggle of survivors—some of whom moaned as they limped.

"*Basta!*" Hull cried, while on the yacht an interested gallery observed this development. "Come a bit closer. There! Far enough! Stop there!"

They stopped.

"We surrender, *señor,*" said one of the advance guard, in Spanish. "We are defeated. Spare to us the life. Take us back to Cuba."

"I'll take you to inferno! Lucky I don't mow you down where you stand! Come aboard, now, one at a time, or I start shooting *pronto!*"

They came aboard, one at a time; and, as the standard bearer reached the deck, Minot snatched from him the collapsible fish pole.

"Where the devil did this come from?" he demanded. "Who's been making free with my two-hundred-dollar rod?"

"What I wish to ascertain," the professor put in, "is who has abstracted my botanizing case, leaving in considerable disorder my botanical and biological specimens?"

"That flag," Angelina said, "looks very much like the yacht's linen. It is extraordinary what pirates will do, even to the point of robbing our very beds!"

Hull gave no ear to all this. He was busily supervising the work of disarming and tying up the pirates, then crowding them into the fo'c's'le.

"Now, then, captain," Hull inquired, "when do we sail?"

"Ready any time, sir. You certainly snatched 'em baldheaded."

"Thanks, cap'n. And they won't get any better stacked up in that way, forward." Hull expansively waved a hand. "Let's go."

Sailors leaped to cast off hawsers. Engines woke to purring activity. Away from the wharf drew the Vagabond. In a swirl of black water churned to phosphorescence,

with her searchlight picking out the channel, she piled up speed.

The Stygian loom of the island and of Fort Jefferson swiftly faded. At full drive, the yacht sped eastward through the night.

"Now," Hull remarked, peering through the wheelhouse window, "we'll take a look at Don Tiburón. Let's see, cap'n, what your engines can do."

They picked the don out of that dark, mysterious night in about one hour and a half. Far ahead, the silvery beam of the searchlight revealed a dark spot on the ghostly waters. As the Vagabond sped swiftly eastward, this spot became a helpless boat, with equally helpless figures in it, rocked in the cradle of the deep.

"They're adrift," Hull observed. "Apparently, when you loosen the nuts on a propeller shaft, the propeller will drop off, in time."

"I reckon the don couldn't do anything about it," Captain Matt judged. "There was nothing went wrong with the engine, anyhow. Hammerslow could swear high and holy to that!"

Hull chuckled as the Vagabond surged up to the drifting motor launch, and backed her engines. At the yacht's rail, all hands saw Hammerslow and the sailor, likewise Don Tiburón and the don's subpirates, blinking up at them.

"Bring Gonzales up from the fo'c's'le!" Hull commanded. And it was done.

"*Nombre de Dios!*" the don cried, as he beheld his lieutenant. "What is this?"

"This," Hull called out, "is Exhibit A—a dear friend of yours, all trussed up for basting. And Exhibit B, here, is your Lewis gun. On the island, some of your cutthroats have joined the dodo in extinction. We've got a bunch of the survivors in our fo'c's'le. Savvy?"

Don T., ghastly in that blinding ray, groaned.

"Too bad the propeller came off," Hull added. "She's buried where she fell. Now you, my dear don, are coming aboard to share our hospitality. You'll be buried where you fall, too."

"*Por Dios, señor!* You—you would not massacre a prisoner of war? We have an Spanish proverb—"

"Not massacred, my dear don. I only mean you fell for our little stunts, that's all. So you'll be buried accordingly—for about twenty years in the hoosegow. Piracy on the high seas, get me? And as for

Espanish proverbs, there's one you've overlooked: 'They went out for wool and came home shorn.' Now look alive to come aboard!"

In the cabin of the Vagabond, as she once more sped eastward to Key West, the banker, Judith, and Hull were engaged in what might properly be called a conference. The banker had summarily dismissed all the others, for he imperatively desired explanations.

"Amazing! This gets me!" he ejaculated. "You were taking desperate chances, young man, crippling our launch, and trusting to luck that you'd put your fantastic program through!"

"For desperate conditions," Hull replied calmly, "desperate makeshifts."

"Yes, but, damn it, sir, suppose your program hadn't worked?"

Tiger Minot had become nearly apoplectic, although Hull remained quite cool. Judith's eyes danced. "With that launch disabled, and Don Tiburón unable to get the ransom in three days," the banker fumed, "we might have all been murdered in cold blood!"

"It was that or nothing," Hull maintained. "The don had us in a jam, and I had to sign on the dotted line." He smiled expansively. "And it wouldn't have done us any good, anyhow, even if he had reached Miami."

"Why not?"

"Well, sir, I won't try to highhat you about my financial condition. I haven't got a million."

"What?"

"Nor any appreciable part of one, either."

"By Gad, sir! You—you mean that was all a bluff?"

"A bluff by any other name would sound as strong. Here," and he produced a check book from his pocket. This book he handed to Minot. "See for yourself, sir, my total resources."

"But—why, this is—" The banker blinked. "This is a mere bagatelle!"

"But all my own, sir—that is, unless a certain check that I overlooked has been presented. In which case I am overdrawn seventy-eight cents!"

"Great holy debentures! You mean to tell me—"

"Let me see, dad!" Judith exclaimed. "How gorgeous!"

"Certainly not!" the banker retorted. "I'd be ashamed to have you know what this young man's total resources really are."

"Total resources, nothing!" the girl cried. "Maybe in the bank, yes. But in his heart and brain—why, my goodness, dad, he's got you skun forty ways!"

Minot handed the check book back to Hull, who pocketed it.

"Thanks for those few kinds words," Roger remarked. "I'll always be grateful for 'em, Judy."

"Judy!" the banker puffed. "Judy, indeed! And you—you, my daughter, practically engaged to Mr. Van Kleek!"

"Do I look like a girl that 'd be practically engaged to anybody without a punch?" Judith demanded. "And, if Roger, here, hasn't got a punch, I'd like to know who has!"

"Punch and Judy—that makes a good combination," Hull pensively observed, and then he spoke briskly: "Everybody else has surrendered, Mr. Minot—even Judy. You're next."

"Well, by— Of course, I know I owe you a reward, but—"

"Nothing of the kind, sir," Hull retorted. "I've already collected it, and it's mine. You're looking at it—excuse me, at her—right this minute."

"You—I—well, I'll be— Talk about nerve!" The banker turned an interesting purple beneath the cabin lights. "If I had a nerve like that, in my business—"

"You have, by proxy," the girl assured him. "Why shouldn't you take your son-in-law into business with you?"

"My—what?"

"He will be, to-morrow."

"Yes, sir, the well-known *mañana*," Hull corroborated.

"Fact, dad! At Key West we're going to be joined in the high explosive bombs of matrimony!"

"Don't be absurd!" the banker snorted.

"We had that all fixed up as long ago as last night," the young man added. "Who d'you suppose I pulled all those little stunts for, anyhow, Mr. Minot? To save you—or—or Mrs. Angelina Saltmarsh and her professor?"

"It was me, me, me!" the girl exulted.

"How perfectly, gorgeously—"

"Thrilling is right," Roger Hull agreed.

THE END

THE SAILOR AND THE SEA

I ASKED a sailor about the sea,
His love of it seemed so strange to me,
For he had no home, and he had no wife,
And the roar and the ropes were all his life,
And the terrible to-and-fro,
And the gales
And the frozen sails.
Then the sailor he smiled on me.
"You must a landsman be
Took up with little things," said he;
"But we that sailor men be
Are used to the rough of the sea,
We hate things soft,
And to go aloft
Is just like music to me . . .
'Tis true," he said, "my love is dead—
But then I have the sea,
For all the dreams I ever had
Of home and babes, and lass and lad,
Have drifted out to sea . . .
As I climb aloft and crawl along
The dipping, swaying spars,
I clutch, instead of my lost hopes,
The everlasting stars."

Nicholas Breton

Number Five

HOW A CLEVER PIECE OF STRATEGY WON THE HEART, THE
HAND, AND THE WORLDLY WEALTH OF A TICKFALL
WIDOW WHO HAD ALREADY HAD FOUR HUSBANDS

By E. K. Means

"IS dar any unfinished bizness?" Vinegar Atts asked, as he rubbed his bald head with a large bandanna kerchief and gazed around the walls of the Henscratch, his mind absent, his lips pouty, his manner resembling that of a disinterested attendant at the funeral of an undesirable citizen.

"Naw! Us niggers don't leave nothin' ondone," Figger Bush sighed. "We don't start nothin' we cain't finish. In fack, our wuck is so well done up dat nothin' ain't lef' over to occupy our minds. Atter dis, I'm in favor of unfinished bizness bein' lef' ondone, so we kin call it up."

"Is dar any new bizness?" Vinegar inquired mournfully, in the hopeless tone of one who already knew the answer.

Nobody responded, and at this point conversation necessarily ceased. A cart drawn by a superannuated mule made its slow way toward the business section of Tickfall, and with every revolution of the wheels there was a deafening screech which pierced the ear like needle points.

"My stars an' garters!" Pap Curtain snarled, as he glared out of the window at the aged and withered colored woman who sat in the driver's seat. A green sunbonnet was pulled over her head so that no part of her face was visible except her nose and chin—a nose which sagged down and a chin which stuck up so that the two almost touched. "Nachelly, dat's a widder woman's outfit, an' she ain't got enough sense to grease de wheels of her cart. I hopes she breaks down!"

Half a block down the street the vehicle stopped, and the aged woman climbed out and entered a cabin.

"Why didn't she pass on off away?" Pap snarled. "Now we got to listen to dat

wheel music when she gits started on off agin."

Then for a little while the Big Four sat in silence, staring across the brown, sun-parched fields toward the dark, cloudlike patch of green that marked the beginning of the Little Moccasin Swamp.

The door of the Henscratch was pushed open quietly, and an old colored man entered silently and glanced with an air of relief at the four men who sat at the table. He had found the people he sought.

As the Big Four paid no attention to him, he sank timidly upon a chair near the door and sat nervously spinning a ragged wool hat upon the gnarled forefinger of his left hand. The interest of the four men was concentrated upon a little incident in the meadow just outside of the window. A buzzard sailing high overhead threw his shadow upon the ground. A hound pup sprang up and chased the shadow, pouncing upon it with all four feet, and wondering why it constantly eluded him. The spiral flight of the bird confined the shadow to a small circuit and gave the pup plenty of exercise.

Finally the young canine got himself in a position where, instead of his chasing the shadow, the dark, evasive, moving thing advanced rapidly toward him. With a frightened whimper the pup tucked his tail between his legs and ran for his life.

"Dat pup figgered dat a hant wus chasin' him," Pap Curtain laughed. "He didn't mind hoppin' on a hant from behind, but he didn't crave to meet up wid one comin' todes him."

Then the cart started again, and the pup, attracted by the whining, deafening screech of the complaining wheels, began to trail the vehicle in canine curiosity.

"Dat pup ain't got no profound mind," Skeeter remarked. "Ef I wus skeart of a hant, I wouldn't run from no shadder on de ground an' den leave out an' foller after grandmaw in her cart. She looks to me like somepin dat's been dead about ten days."

"In all my bawn days I ain't never seed no hant," Figger Bush asserted. "Mebbe it's because I ain't looked whar dey wus at; but of co'se I ain't huntin' no ghost. Ef I ever sees one, it will be accidental, an' when dat time comes I ain't gwine take no long look. De feller whut wants to see kin hab my place to stand—I'm leavin'!"

"I don't b'lieve in sperits," Vinegar Atts declared. "Hants an' ghosts—dar ain't no such; but I'm shore skeart of 'em, an' I'm had 'em to run me pretty frequent."

"I don't know nothin' about it," Pap Curtain avowed. "I'm a gravedigger, an' de cemingtery is my nachel bizness hang-out when I gits any customers; an' under dem succumstances religion is always been my shield. When I'm diggin' a grave, you kin hear me singin' religion toons fer a mile."

"I'm heerd you," Skeeter snickered. "You shore do bawl 'em!"

"Well, suh, dar muss be somepin in dis here ghost bizness," Pap resumed. "Now you ponder on dis fack—you ride a hoss down de road an' see another hoss layin' on de side of de road. His legs is stiff out an' his head is flat on de ground, but dat hoss ain't dead—he's sleepin'. De hoss you is ridin' will trot right past an' not notice."

"Dat's so," Vinegar agreed.

"But if dat hoss alongside de road is dead, whut happens?" Pap inquired.

"De hoss you is ridin' ain't gwine past," Figger Bush told him. "He'll see dat corp' a mile away, an' begin to snort an' cut up scandalous. De closer you git, de more cuttin' up he do."

"How come?" Pap Curtain asked.

No answer.

"Dat's whut makes me sing," Pap grinned.

"All niggers is skittish like dat," Vinegar Atts remarked apologetically. "Now you take me—I don't like to converse in no telephone. It's proper to shut yo' eyes when you is talkin' to de good Lawd, but I don't crave to talk to nobody else I cain't see."

A timid cough sounded at the far end

of the room, where the aged visitor sat listening and twisting his hat. The four men turned their heads and gazed upon him with a look of surprise.

"New bizness, niggers," Vinegar whispered. "I knows de signs!"

"Fetch yo' chair up to dis table an' set down on it, Wump," Skeeter said cordially. "We's all here waiting fer you to come. Whut is yo' complaint?"

"I come here to git a few advices," Wump Walker remarked, as he placed his ragged wool hat upon the table and ran his fingers through his kinky hair. "I'm gittin' ole, an' cain't foller my own mind like I done wunst. I'm tried my own jedgment off an' on recent, an' made some bad mistakes doin' it."

"Dat is whut us four is for," Vinegar Atts assured him. "Our most frequent bizness is advicin' niggers. An' we never makes no mistakes."

"Dat's right," Pap Curtain agreed. "When we dognose a case an' obscribe de remedy, we hits it eve'y time, excusin' when complications sets up."

"My case is simple," Wump said. "My trouble is ole age. I been in dis world a long time. All my chillun is growed up an' left me, an' my four wifes all got tired of me an' deevoo'ced me out of mattermony. I ain't got no home. I cain't hardly make a livin'. White folks won't hire me, because dey say I's ole an' lazy an' triflin' an' foolish an' fible an' fergitful. Now whut is to be did under dem succumstances? Nothin'!"

"Dat answer is easy," Vinegar Atts replied promptly. "Git married to somebody. You been married four times. Pick another, an' she'll be number five."

"Whar kin I find a woman whut kin suppute me?" Wump inquired. "About all I kin do is to set in a easy-chair an' ponder."

"You is mo' ornamental dan useful," Skeeter Butts agreed; "but ef you kin git somebody to love you, she'll buy you a red plush rockin'-chair an' a new corncob pipe, an' she'll dig fish bait fer you, an' you'll be fixed easy fer life."

"Dar ain't no such woman," Wump declared sadly.

"I knows one now," Pap Curtain dis-sented. "She owns a little four-room cabin all plastered on de inside, because one of her husbunts wus a plasterer by trade. She's got fawty acres of tol'able gullified

land, because anodder of her husbunts was a farmer by trade, an' he raised crops between dem gullies. She's got a ole delopidated mule, all dat's left over from her third husbunt—he wus a hoss trader by trade. An' she's got some hound dawgs—her las' an' fourth husbunt went strong on dawgs, an' had aplenty. He wus mighty nigh a dawg king, or somepin like dat, by trade. An' wid all dem sad remembrunces aroun' her, de widder is lonesome. I seed her pass jes' a little while ago, an' she shore looked like she needed comfortin' or somepin. She warn't a happy-lookin' soul."

"She's had four an' you's had four, an' bofe of you will be each yuther's number five!" Figger Bush quacked.

"Whar is all her husbunts at?" Wump asked.

"Dead."

"Whar do she live at?" Wump inquired. Pap Curtain waved his hand across the broad fields to where the dark green of the swamp merged with the horizon.

"You kin see de smoke risin' from her cabin from dik place, but she's in town now, an' ain't makin' no smoke."

"Is dar any objections to her?" Wump asked.

"No mo' objections dan dar is to you," Pap grinned. "She's like you is—got age on her."

"Whar kin I ketch up wid dis here widder?" Wump asked. "I'll go take a look, anyhow."

"She passed in a cart a little while ago," Pap told him.

"Le's all go hunt her," Skeeter Butts suggested eagerly. "I wants to see dis ole age love case git good started."

"I don't promise I'll take her," Wump protested; "but I'll look her over."

"Don't git so hard to please," Vinegar snapped. "You's gittin' a widder wid a house, a little land, a mule, an' some dawgs. She ain't gittin' nothin'."

II

THE five men, sauntering idly about the town, found the widow's mule standing at the hitching rack in the rear of the courthouse. They gazed at the conveyance in solemn meditation, wondering what was the proper move next.

"I reckon Wump oughter climb up in dat cart an' play like he's takin' a nap," Figger Bush suggested. "Ef de widder don't notice him, mebbe she'll haul him

out to her house, an' dat will help him to meet her 'quaintance an' git started."

"'Tain't safe to be nappin' when you's dealin' wid a widder woman," Pap Curtain remarked.

"I ain't doin' it," Wump assured him. "I ain't shuttin' my eyes ontill I gits a good look at her. Whut mought her name be?"

"'Tain't no use to know her name," Pap told him. "Ef you marries her, dat 'll change her name. But ef you is jes' 'bleeged to know, up to now she calls herself Dukey Stiles."

"Hold on, niggers," Skeeter Butts broke in. "I'm got de right notion. I'm gwine borry a monkey wrench unbeknownst to de owner."

He opened the tool chest of an automobile standing near, and came back with a wrench. Going to the cart, he used the implement to remove the nut from the hub of one of the wheels, and then returned it to its place. Handing the nut to Wump, he remarked:

"You put dis nut in yo' pocket. You set aroun' whar you kin keep yo' eye on dis cart. When de widder rides away, you foller. When de cart wheel comes off, you go out in de road an' pretend like you pick up dis nut whar it dropped off at. Den you run up an' rescue de widder. Fix up her wheel, grease up her axles, help her out'n her troubles, tell her she needs a spry, active man about de place—"

"An' ax her to marry you," Vinegar concluded.

"You-all shore have got my bizness advised out fine," Wump grinned, as he pocketed the nut; "but ef she don't look to suit me, I'll throw dis nut away an' run."

Old Dukey had come to town to spend the day. She shopped from store to store, but did not make a two-bit purchase in all the places she visited. At noon she came to her cart, fed the mule four ears of corn, ate a cold corn pone and a slice of cheese, and inspired Wump with the hope that she was getting ready to "leave out." But no—she was getting ready to visit all her Tickfall colored friends and "ax 'em howdy."

Wump bought a bag of peanuts and an orange, and waited. He shifted his seat under a tree as the shadow moved with the sun, and waited while he sat the sun halfway around the tree. The Big Four called

during the afternoon to encourage him to persevere to the end, and they lingered with him garrulously to sustain his vigil. They bought him a ham sandwich on his solemn promise that when he married the widow he would have them all out to his house to dinner, and would feed them high.

On their second call, the five of them contributed a nickel each, and bought a watermelon, and declared a party. While the bridegroom waited, the bride lingered and delayed her coming, and two of the wedding party lay down upon the ground and slumbered.

"All of dis expe'unce is good fer you, Wump," Vinegar Atts told him. "In de fust place, you learns patience. Ef a married man don't hab dat, he ain't meek an' mild an' gintle like a little child, an' befo' long de mattermony gits to be a battermony an' de bride beats him up wid a skillet. In de secont place, you learns to wait, an' a married man spends all his life waitin' fer his wife. He's got to learn to labor an' to wait. Ef de lady say she'll be ready in a minute, jes' shut off de gas an' cut off de ignition, so de engyne won't git overheated, because time is shorely gwine pass befo' de lady comes to pass. In de nex' place, de night is comin', an' ef Dukey has a accidunt in de dark, she'll be moughty proud to hab a man ride home wid her an' perteck her. Don't matter how dark-complected a colored nigger woman is, she's skeart of de dark."

Vinegar was enumerating these various points on his fingers. He had assumed his professional oratorical pose, and, under the stimulation of the watermelon, was threatening to deliver a long speech; but Wump interrupted.

"I ain't got to see dat woman yit," he wailed. "Ef I got to wait till nighttime, how kin I see her in de dark?"

"Aw, whut do you keer whut she looks like?" Skeeter Butts snapped, aroused from his slumber by Wump's wail, and feeling peevish because of the disturbance. "You look like de debbil yo'se'f, an' you needn't think you kin choose no movin'-pitcher beauty in yo' ole age!"

"Rake up some leaves an' trash, an' build a fire to see her by," Figger Bush suggested. "Pertend like you need de fire to see how to fix de wheel, an' take a side glance look at de old gal."

As the Big Four walked away from the courthouse, they met old Isaiah Gaitskill,

visiting in town from the hog camp in the Little Moccasin Swamp. Isaiah was old and withered and toothless, bent like a grasshopper and wrinkled like the hull of a walnut. His white hair fitted his head like a skullcap, and his keen eyes were still alert and intelligent after the lapse of eighty years. He carried bundles, indicating that he had recently purchased some new clothes.

"Whut you tryin' to be a bean jelly fer, Isaiah?" Skeeter Butts asked. "Gwine to a weddin'?"

"Dat's whut," Isaiah grinned; "only not till yit, not so soon. Me an' de Widder Stiles is courtin'."

"Hush, nigger!" Vinegar Atts bellowed. "You is too ole to git married. Wid one foot in de grave an' de yuther all but, you should oughter be ashamed to be thinkin' dem thoughts. Too ole—ole an' fibble an' in yo' secont imbecility—got yo' secont sight, an' mighty high ole enough to cut another set of teeth—no, no, no! Positively not. It cain't be did. Too ole, ole man, too late, too late!"

"Yes, suh, I's too ole to git married to a young gal," Isaiah answered; "but, you see, Dukey Stiles is got her age on her, too."

"All right, Isaiah," Vinegar said, as they moved on; "only don't ax us to he'p yo' mattermony along or advice you none. Us niggers is got our money on another hoss."

"I don't need no he'p," Isaiah retorted. "I been married plenty times befo', an' I knows my way aroun' de track."

III

DUKEY came back to the cart about sundown. She climbed in with the feebleness of age and rheumatic bones, and started slowly toward her home, her progress marked by a shriek at every revolution of the wheels. It was a surprise to Wump how long the creaking wheel stayed on the cart. He followed the conveyance through the part of the town inhabited by the whites, and through three negro settlements. Then the long, dusty highway stretched out before his weary eyes, and he had about decided that somebody had fixed the wheel when—zip!

The wheel rolled off into a ditch beside the road, the old woman rolled out of the cart with a loud squall, and the old mule was grateful for a chance to stop. Old Wump started running toward the victim

of the accident, stopped and rubbed the nut he had taken out of his pocket in the dust, and ran up to rescue the widow in distress.

"Lawd hab mussy on you, sister!" he howled. "Is you hurted bad? Did you fraction any bones?"

Dukey Stiles did not answer. She sat in the middle of the dusty road and squalled. Wump helped her to her feet, brushed off the dust, and told her to stop bawling and help him lift the cart so that he could put on the wheel. When the repairs had been made, he said:

"You better let me ride along wid you. Dat wheel mought come off agin."

"Git in!" Dukey said promptly. "I been needin' of a man ever since my las' husbunt up an' died on me. I shore will find you handy an' make you useful aroun' de place."

They rode to the cabin together. Then Wump fed the mule, milked a cow, slopped a pig, carried water, chopped wood, built a fire, shucked some corn, churned some butter, fixed a gap in the fence, and carried the milk down to the spring house. While he was resting, the widow advised him to fix two hoe handles and sharpen a scythe at the grindstone. Just as he was ready to drop dead from overwork, he was called in to eat his evening meal which had been prepared at his hostess's leisure.

By the light of the kitchen lamp he got his first good look at Dukey. She was old, withered, wrinkled, pinch-faced, and black. Her voice was one of command, accustomed to ordering a man around. Wump admitted to himself that he did not think much of her. She was not attractive, and the omens were not favorable for a happy and restful married life; but he knew he could not expect to get much. He had nothing but himself to offer in return. The Big Four had impressed that fact upon his mind.

When the meal was ended, Wump was commanded to do a few more chores. Then Dukey handed him the little oil lamp and said:

"You kin sleep in dat front room. Dat's de room whar Jim was sick so long. Dat's de room whar he died at."

Obediently Wump carried the lamp to the place indicated, and commenced his preparations for bed. Then certain strange figures and inscriptions upon the walls of the room attracted his attention, and he

took up the lamp to inspect them more closely.

What he saw made his hair stand on end.

Jim Stiles had been sick for about four months. His physician had been a young man recently graduated from a medical college. The doctor had insisted upon Dukey keeping a nurse's chart of her ministrations to her husband; and as Dukey had no paper to write on, she had kept the late dog king's chart by writing it upon the white plastered wall.

It was all there, day after day for one hundred and five days—an awful scrawl of words where Dukey had made her record, and a neater inscription where the young physician had left his instructions. Dukey recorded that at five o'clock in the morning she gave medicine, at seven she served eggs and milk, at ten the patient drank a bottle of pop; and in a column beside this she recorded that Jim slept, complained of headache, was restless and "delirrious," with two r's, sat up for five minutes, and all the rest.

Wump Walker passed from chart to chart and read every word. He traced the declining pathway of the dog king to the last lamentable end, when the last dog howled and all the dogs lost their king. Long before he had finished deciphering the hieroglyphics, all sleep had forsaken his eyelids.

He glanced fearsomely at the rude bed where Jim had slept. The room seemed to echo with his demands for milk and eggs and a bottle of pop, to sound with the scratching feet of dogs upon the uncarpeted floor. Wump could hear them as they sniffed at the strange odors of the sick room and slapped the side of the bed with their tails as they greeted their master.

The terrified negro would not have gone to bed in that room for a million dollars. He blew out the lamp, sneaked to the front door, and let himself out of the house into the night.

As he stepped out, he dropped his wool hat, and he did not care to stoop and feel for it upon the porch floor. He preferred to be ready to travel, not in a stooping posture, where something might sneak up on him from behind. He wanted to bawl as loud as he could, but the dog king's hounds were plentiful about the place, and he had no time to make the acquaintance of strange dogs; so he sneaked away silently,

awakening one canine, who bade him farewell with a long, lugubrious howl.

IV

THE next morning Wump Walker appeared at the Henscratch, where he found the Big Four holding their regular morning session.

"I come to report, brudders," he announced hesitantly.

"Did you ax her?" Vinegar demanded. "Whut is she said?"

"Ain't axed her yit," Wump answered gloomily. "De fack is, I'm kinder discouraged wid de job."

"You cain't back out now, nigger!" Pap Curtain told him. "You done promised us a dinner at yo' house when you git married off, an' I craves fried chicken, corn pone, fresh butter, some sweet milk, a little boiled ham, some vege'bles on de side, a couple slices apple pie, a cup coffee, an' wind up wid a little dram of corn-shuck licker."

"You'd shore git it all, ef I got de woman," Wump told him; "but dat female ain't got no heart. She invited me to sleep in de room whar Jim died at, an' in de very bed whar he quit."

"He didn't die in no bed," Pap Curtain snapped. "He wus settin' up lookin' out of de winder."

"I don't keer," Wump sighed. "In dat room Jim appeared to be too present. I got de notion dat he wus still hangin' aroun'. His record is writ all over de wall. It's scandalous how Jim occupies dat room! I couldn't stand it, so I left out and walked back to town las' night. I walked fast, too."

"Of co'se, de trouble wid marryin' dat widder is dat she's got four husbunts once removed," Vinegar Atts remarked. "Not ev'ry feller craves to step in de dead man's shoes—"

"Lawdymussy! Don't do dat!" Skeeter Butts said warningly, and shuddered at a sudden recollection. "You remember whut happened down at Sawtown to dem three men, don't you?"

"Naw," Vinegar said. "Whut come to pass?"

"Well, suh, dat nigger Rosie had a husbunt whut wus bit by a rattlesnake, an' he died. De snake bit him right through de leather of a new boot halfway up to de knee. Rosie, she married agin, an' her secont husbunt wore de fust man's boots

to a dance. He come home an' complained of a scratch on his leg hurtin' him, an' befo' mawnin' he died. Rosie, she married agin, an' her third husbunt wore dem same boots dat belonged to her fust an' secont, an' dey found him dead in de sawmill wid a little sore scratch on de side of his leg. De doctor examined dat boot an' found de fang of de rattlesnake still stickin' in de leather. Dat snake done kilt three men."

"I ain't wearin' no dead man's shoes," Wump Walker said uneasily. "In fack, I done kinder got out de notion of takin' any dead man's place. I'm skeart."

"You got to do it!" Vinegar bawled. "You is a ole delapidated nigger, an' you'll starve to death ef you don't make arrangements fer yo' ole age. Ef dat wall is all wrote up wid Jim's last days, you kin whitewash de wall an' rub Jim out. Ef de clothes don't fit you, you kin sell 'em an' buy some more. Ef you don't want de shoes, go barefoot."

"All right, all right!" Wump groaned. "Mebbe I kin git used to it, but jes' now I'm kinder onsottled in my mind. Excuse in' dat, I found out dat Dukey ain't no easy boss, an' she shore is one hard looker, no matter where yo' looks at."

"Stop ponderin' all dem things," Figger Bush advised. "Keep yo' mind on de house, an' de land, an' de sawsiety of de dawgs, an' how you kin spend yo' last days in peace. All you got to do is jes' set at de winder whar Jim died an' watch de sunset."

"I reckon dat is whut I muss do," Wump sighed.

"When you gwine back an' ax her?" Skeeter demanded.

"Dunno. I ain't feelin' like a five-mile walk dis mawnin'," Wump answered. "Mebbe I'll go to-morrer or nex' day, or mebbe nex' week. I don't favor dese here git-married-quick weddin's."

"Listen, Wump," Skeeter snapped. "You done wasted enough of our time. Now you's gwine out to Dukey Stiles's today an' settle dis little bizness once fer all. I knows dat another nigger man is got his eyes on de widder, an' you got to wuck fast. Us is got our money on you, an' we ain't lettin' our hoss git balky an' refuse to run."

"Dat ole woman is a puffleckly awful thing!" Wump wailed.

"You is, too," Skeeter announced; "so you jes' got to grit yo' teeth an' stand her."

"I ain't got no teeth," Wump pro-

claimed triumphantly. "Tooth jerkers all along de years is pulled 'em all out."

"Aw, shut up!" Skeeter commanded. "You reminds my mind of dat pup whut chased de buzzard's shadder till he saw it comin' his way, an' den he tucked his tail an' legged it away from dat place."

"To-day is yo' las' chance," boomed the Rev. Vinegar Atts. Then an appropriate scriptural passage occurred to his mind, and he pronounced it with the impressive emphasis of a prophet: "'To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not yo' heart!'"

"Ef you is too fiddle in de legs to walk to Dukey's, I'll loant you my flivver to-night," Skeeter said. "Come an' git it about dark."

When Wump had gone out, the Tickfall quartet began to sing. One stanza seemed to express an appropriate sentiment concerning the business of the day:

"Years passed on, an' death took Jim away;
When Jim died, his widdar married me.
Now we're married, oft I think of Jim
Sleepin' in de graveyard—peacefully!"

V

LATE that afternoon Wump returned to the Henscratch, climbed into Skeeter's machine, and rode out to the home of Dukey Stiles.

A heavy fog was boiling up from the Little Moccasin Swamp. Long white trailers of mist were sweeping across the fields, clothing the face of the sun and the beauty of the landscape with bridal veils. A narrow lane led from the main highway to Dukey's house—a lane of "gumbo," soft as a sponge and slick as wet soap. Wump did not venture into this, for he knew he would be sure to mire his machine. He left the little car on the highway and walked to the house.

He found old Isaiah Gaitskill sitting upon the porch, smoking a corncob pipe.

"Is you come to cornverse de widdar, Wump?" Isaiah asked.

"Yes, suh."

"She's out potterin' aroun' wid de chores," Isaiah said. "You better not let her know you's here, or she'll wuck you mighty nigh to death. She's done kilt four husbunts. Dey got overhet wid overwuck an' sot down to suck some wind, but dey got cooled off too soon an' died of conjunction of de lungs. She found some odd jobs fer me, but I knocked off, because I got to be gwine back to de hog camp befo' de

fog sets in too heavy. Leastwise, dat's my good escuse."

"Dat's a good one. De fog's gittin' thick as soup," Wump agreed.

A decrepit hound dog came around the corner of the house and gazed mournfully at the two men. His pathetic, lugubrious face revealed a heart bowed down with secret sorrow, a soul oppressed with unspoken anguish, and a life wrecked beyond recovery by a tragedy that no tongue could describe. His were the tear-washed, faded eyes of one who had looked upon all the agony and heartbreak of the world. His loose, ragged, cat-scratched, brier-torn ears were permanently adroop, like flags hung low over buried hopes, and his flabby lips were shaped and ready for unceasing ululations of despair and woe.

The melancholy beast sniffed contemptuously at the knees of the two men, and returned, sorrowfully, thoughtfully, whence he came. These were just two colored persons, sons of laughter and song, living the lives of old nigger men; while he was a dog, and was doomed to live a dog's life all his days.

"Dat houn' acks like he's got somepin on his mind," Wump commented.

"Ain't you never heard tell about dat dog?" Isaiah asked, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Naw. A hound dawg ain't never done nothin' wuth tellin' about," Wump grumbled cynically.

"Listen to dis here tale," Isaiah replied. "Jim Stiles had some kind of heart trouble, an' he used to set in a rockin' chair right by dat winder, whar you see dat bench on de porch."

"Yes, suh."

"Jim set in dat chair wid his head leanin' ag'in' de side of de winder, an' dat hound useter hop up on de bench an' lay his head on de bottom part of de winder, an' dey would bofe set dar an' look at each yuther all day long. Dat houn' wus his favorite dog. Dey growed ole together."

"Yes, suh."

"Well, suh, I wus here when Jim died out. He wus settin' jes' like I told you wid his dog. All of a sudden dat dog raised a awful howl an' jumped off de bench, an' run down de lane, howlin' like he done gone crazy, an' lookin' up! Den he sot down right whar you see dat tree halfway down dat lane, an' looked up an' howled fer half a hour, as ef he had saw

Jim go off in de sky an' couldn't foller him no farther. An' when we went to Jim— Jim was dead!"

"My Gawd!" Wump exclaimed.

"Yes, suh, it wus about dis time of de evenin', an' a kind of foggy sky, an' dem long trailers of fog looked like hants dat wus traipsin' aroun' in de fields in deir shirt tails, an' de whole worl' wus still an' restful like. Whut you reckon dat dog saw up in de sky? Whut did he do dat way fer?"

"Gawd knows!" Wump said, with a shudder.

"Well, I muss take a soon start ef I expecks to git home befo' it's late," observed Isaiah, as he stepped off the porch and turned toward the corner of the house in the direction of the great swamp. "Good-by!"

Wump sat for half an hour, uneasy in the gathering darkness. His eyes rested upon the bench at the other end of the porch, where the devoted hound had reposed, gazing fondly into the face of his sick master.

A screech owl in a pecan tree uttered its weird, piercing cry—a sign of death. Wump rose hastily and turned the pockets of his pantaloons out—which hushed the howl of the owl.

Far over in the swamp a wild cat screamed like a woman in great pain. The cold chills chased down Wump's spine, and his kinky hair straightened out and stood on end.

Then Wump recalled the conversation he had overheard in the Henscratch. How did the horse know afar off that his fellow lay dead upon the public highway, and begin to "cut up scandalous"? Do all dogs howl because they behold the spirits of the dead, invisible to human eyes? He had often wondered what made an alligator grunt, a wolf bark, and an owl hoot. There did not seem to be any reason for it, but if they did it because they saw a hant, why, of course—

There was a patter of feet in the hall-

way, and Jim's favorite dog came out of the house. He thrust an inquiring nose against Wump's leg, and his damp muzzle touched the old negro's hand with the chill of death.

"My Gawd, dawg! Git away from me!" Wump screamed.

He sprang from the porch, ran across the little lawn, and galloped down the middle of the lane with such speed that the gumbo mud sticking to his feet was thrown over the fence on either side as he raised his heels for another gigantic stride. His one idea was speed.

As he passed the tree halfway down the lane, a long, weird howl arose on the other side of the fence. It was half human, half canine. It sounded like the creditable effort of a human being to imitate a hound howling a mournful farewell to the departing spirit of a beloved master. It was the lamentation of one who could not follow where the other went. It accelerated Wump's progress. He had been going some before; after he heard the howl, the gobs of mud thrown from his flying feet were like the bullets from a machine gun.

When Wump had passed, the old gray head of Isaiah Gaitskill rose cautiously above the top of the fence under the tree in the lane. He need not have been so careful, for Wump did not look back. He was striving to forget the things that were behind, looking forward to the things that were before.

After his ghastly demonstration of nocturnal vocalism, Isaiah returned to Dukey's porch and sat down. Jim's favorite dog dropped at his feet and looked up into his face. Isaiah laid his withered hand upon the animal's head, and both found a measure of happiness amid the woes of the world. The old man's pipe was filled with good tobacco, his mind with pleasant anticipations, and his soul with peace. He had never heard that "none but the brave deserve the fair," but his cogitations had that general purport.

"Dat's my widder!" he soliloquized.

THE UTTERMOST

STARS at their perihelion fall,
Waves break when nearest to the sky;
If these can give no more than all—
No more can I!

Thalun Eames

Most Irregular

A MAJOR OF THE NEW ARMY TRIES TO CUT RED TAPE, AND
COMES INTO CONFLICT WITH A GENERAL OF
THE OLD PETRIFIED SCHOOL

By Oliver P. Newman

"WHO do those damned stuffed shirts down at G. H. Q. think they are, anyway?"

The chief of staff blew up with an assortment of linguistic fireworks that would have aroused the whole-hearted appreciation of the hardest boiled buck private of the A. E. F.

"Look at this!" he roared. "Look at it! How in hell do they think we're going to win this war? Sitting around their fancy mahogany desks! Eating in swell restaurants! Dancing, playing tennis, polishing their spurs! Winding up more red tape every day while we're up here in the mud, freezing and dying!"

"By George, they ought to be slapped into the front trenches and given a taste of mustard and shrapnel! Our elegant, gilded staff! Our comic opera tin soldiers, who are supposed to be running this man's army!"

Colonel Frank L. Spalding—regular army, despite his violent infraction of the ninety-sixth article of war—glared at a sheaf of official papers which had just been handed to him by a dripping courier, who had slouched down in a corner and dropped to sleep, exhausted, without removing his helmet or slicker.

From the corner of an upturned gasoline can, serving him as a field desk, a flickering candle threw its dim rays across the colonel's scowling face and revealed the damp interior of a cellar room, avidly seized for division headquarters an hour before, when night caught the shattered command in a jam of traffic as it was being withdrawn to an alleged rest area after four grueling weeks in the line.

Through the crumbled, shell-battered floor and walls of a once stately château

above could be heard the never-ending rumble and roar of war and preparations for war. Guns and caissons, trucks loaded with ammunition and supplies, sputtering motor cycles rushing orders through the drenching dark, and the shuffling, shuffling, shuffling of hob-nailed shoes could be distinguished, moving steadily on and on over what was left of the uneven cobblestones of the village street.

The intermittent boom of American and French artillery at right, at left, and in the rear, was punctuated by screaming shells overhead from both enemy and friendly guns, and by crashing detonations of high explosive near by as Fritz sought the range of crossroad, ammunition dump, and supply train in his nightly endeavor to do his bit in the merry game of war.

The chief of staff unconsciously ducked his head as an unusually big German shell shrieked to a deafening burst that shook bits of plaster from the ceiling. He transferred his glare from the papers in his hand to a natty, smiling young officer of his beloved ally's army, Captain Pierre Moiret, his liaison officer.

"And you French," he roared, "said this was a quiet sector!"

The Frenchman grinned more broadly, and shrugged his shoulders.

"*Mon Dieu*, quiet!" he replied. "Yes, eez eet was quiet until you Americaines arrive. But now—poof! You Americaines—you are always—What eez eet you say—starting some-theeng."

"You're damn exactly right," the chief of staff declared. "We started something! This had been a sitting down war long enough, and, by George, what we start we finish!"

He glared at the imperturbable captain

a moment longer, but aroused nothing more than the latter's customary good-natured smile; so he turned to the third member of the staff present, Major John Donaldson, division adjutant, who, during his chief's outburst, had been busily engaged with a disordered mass of papers and card indexes, which he was sorting and studying by the light of another candle on what had once been a workman's bench, alongside one of the damp walls.

"Donaldson!" he exclaimed. "That gang of armchair generals down at G. H. Q. has disapproved every damned one of our recommendations for Distinguished Service Crosses!"

"What!" the adjutant cried, turning sharply toward the chief of staff.

"Do they think we can win this war on conversation?" Spalding demanded. "By the Eternal, we went through a month of hell with nothing but guts and bayonets, and now, when we ask for a few measly decorations, they swell up under their shining Sam Browne belts, slap their polished boots with riding whips, send their pink pants out to be pressed, buy another bottle of champagne, and turn us down!"

Donaldson, young, vigorous, stiff-jawed, with direct, determined eyes and supple coordination of a strong, well-proportioned body, sprang quickly to Spalding's side and seized the papers from his hand.

"What do they say?" he asked. "What reasons do they give?"

"Not a damned reason! Not a line of explanation, not a word of appreciation or regret! Just 'Disapproved' at the bottom!"

"But, hell a mile, colonel, they can't do that! Why, some of those men were wonderful—heroic—magnificent! They deserve the best the country can give. How about Loring? They surely didn't refuse a cross for Loring?"

"Disapproved the whole works. Don't suppose they even read 'em."

Donaldson looked hastily through the file of papers, and then turned excitedly to Spalding.

"Here's another page," he pointed out, "tacked on after their disapproval. It's about Loring! Listen: 'Attention of the division commander is called, in the case of his recommendation for award of a Distinguished Service Cross to Private John Loring, to General Orders No. 599-B, these headquarters, July 18, 1918.'"

Spalding and Donaldson looked at each other blankly. Captain Moiret shrugged his shoulders, and glanced unconcernedly at his wrist watch.

"What in hell is General Orders 599-B?" Spalding demanded.

"Haven't an idea," the division adjutant replied.

"That's the prize idiocy in indorsements," the chief of staff announced hotly. "Great Jerusalem, they must think we've got nothing to do at the front but mess around with papers. Where the hell are our general orders, anyway?"

"God knows," Donaldson answered. "That last boche shell this morning landed slap-bang alongside my field desk, and blew my records to smithereens. I've been trying to straighten out what's left of them over on that bench, but it's hopeless. I haven't even got a straight record of our casualties."

"Why the devil couldn't the dumb-bell who wrote that indorsement quote the order?"

"More of zee Americaine red tape," the Frenchman murmured, blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke into the air. "I onderstan'. *Mais, oui*, after four years you will onderstan' also."

A softened expression came over the face of the young adjutant.

"But, colonel," he said, in a low, tense voice, "we can't lay down on this. We've got to fight it through and make G. H. Q. see the point. I don't mind so much about the others—although every one of them deserves a cross—but Loring has *got* to have his."

"He's counting on it, living for it, fighting for his life's breath just to hold out until he gets it. We've promised him he shall have it. It may save his life—even though he'll be a wreck if he lives. It's the least we can do for him after his heroic sacrifice."

II

MAJOR DONALDSON turned back the pages of the file until he found the citation which he had written ten days before at the direction of the division commander, and had forwarded by special courier to general headquarters as the basis of the recommendation for award of a cross to John Loring.

As his eye traversed the familiar words, the form of the chief of staff, the French

captain and the sleeping courier faded, the dripping walls of the cellar receded from his consciousness, and he found himself, with a dozen others, back in a muddy trench, huddled into a dim corner just before dawn, stricken tense and immovable by terror, as his staring eyes watched a small, corrugated, oblong thing, not much bigger than an orange, roll bumpily over the duck boards. It did not come from an enemy hand.

Donaldson had seen men killed by shell fire, choked by gas, mowed down by machine gun bullets, and crumpled by rifle fire; but he knew that the most fearsome death of all was the rending, splitting, tearing death of the Mills bomb or hand grenade, now rolling so clumsily toward him, so innocent of appearance, but certain, in the next eye's flash, to destroy him and his comrades.

He had a second's bitter amazement that fate—in the form of an American corporal—had accidentally dropped this one death-dealing missile in his path just as his trip of front line inspection had brought him to that particular spot; and then he felt a body rush past him, knock him almost off his feet, and hurl itself upon the little object of horror.

His eye registered a quick movement of a hand grasping the grenade and frantically trying to shove it under the duck boards, and then he was deafened by a blinding explosion which, his numbed senses noted, even then, was slightly muffled.

He lived again the sickening moment when he and the others lifted up what was left of John Loring, and found a smile on his face and life in his eyes. Unconsciously Donaldson moved his hand to his first aid packet as he remembered hurriedly how they had done what they could for the soldier from their store of instruction in the training camp and their experience during a month of fighting.

Every step of the trip back to the field hospital, to which they bore Loring with the greatest possible care and tenderness, was stamped indelibly upon his memory, as were the words of the apparently dying man, when they tried, incoherently and through honest tears, to thank him. The major again could hear the weak voice whisper: "S all right, boys—I—I jest happened to think of it. You'd a done—the—same—for me."

With a quick straightening of his shoul-

ders, Donaldson came out of his reverie. He blinked his eyes rapidly to get rid of a mistiness that seemed determined to come into them. Folding the file of papers and stuffing them into his breast pocket, he turned to his superior officer.

"Colonel Spalding," he said, "I'm going down to G. H. Q. for Loring's cross."

The chief of staff looked up in surprise. Then he shook his head slowly.

"It's no use, Donaldson," he said. "I know how you feel. I feel the same way myself. I'd like to go down there and give them the rating they deserve. They haven't the faintest idea of the hell and heartbreak we're going through up here. They simply can't get it. Nobody can get it until he's in it."

"You'll just be wasting time when we need you badly for reorganization. When you've been in the army as long as I have, you'll learn that you can't beat the game. You've simply got to swallow what they give you. If you holler, they only make it worse."

"But this isn't target practice or a summer day's hike in peace time in the United States," the major protested. "This is war. Standards are different. Necessities are different. I don't believe the commander in chief would stand for this a minute if he knew it."

Spalding smiled tolerantly.

"I suppose you think you could just walk into his office and say: 'Look here, Jack, this is all wrong; here's the way it should be.'"

"Not in just those words, colonel, but I know I can put it over. I have never said much about it in the army, but when I was in college I was an All-American half back, and for the five years before I went into the training camp I was a reporter on a New York morning newspaper."

"It looks to me now as if I were facing a combination of third down with five yards to gain and a story to get from a Wall Street magnate who kicks out reporters. Please give me your permission to try."

"You'll need more than my permission before you get to G. H. Q.," Spalding said. "You've got French lines, and American lines, and innumerable M. P.'s to pass, and I've got no authority to give you. Furthermore, there's no available transportation. Half our cars and trucks are wrecks, and the other half have ten times what they can do."

"May I have a motor cycle with a side car?"

"Sure, if you're bent on breaking your neck. But you'll never get through."

"I'll make it, some way," Donaldson said determinedly. He turned to Moiret.

"Captain," he asked, "isn't that hospital where they took Loring on the road to G. H. Q.?"

"But certainly," the French officer replied, "only ten kilometers from where we stand."

"I'll stop a moment to see the poor fellow, and try to cheer him," Donaldson said. "Would you like to go with me? It might please him to receive a visit from an ally."

"Wiz great pride," the captain quickly answered. "Eef my small bit in appreciation of such most magnificent gallantry will add one tiny theeng to his comfort, I have happiness to go."

Ten minutes later Donaldson and Moiret were chugging cautiously over a narrow, shell-torn road, without lights, through a welter of trucks, rolling kitchens, staff cars, ammunition wagons, lumbering artillery, swearing drivers, kicking horses, and cursing, rain-soaked infantry, moving up to the front by slow stages under heavy packs, or plodding toward the rear with scant equipment, dropping down on the wet banks of the ditches beside the road at every interruption, and shivering from the cold like men with the ague.

Not a light showed, except when some mud-caked young officer, struggling almost vainly to straighten out a tie up, flashed his electric pocket lamp momentarily, or when some lucky soldier with a dry cigarette cupped a match cautiously in his palms to light it.

Donaldson found that the darkness quickened his sense of hearing, despite the roar of German, French, and American cannon behind him, and he learned to distinguish vehicles and troops coming toward him by sound and to avoid collision, although often by the narrowest possible margin.

He was so intent upon the difficult task of managing the motor cycle that he made no attempt at conversation, and Captain Moiret, in the side car, maintained a stoic silence except for one observation, as the pair passed an ammunition truck, mired to the hubs on one side, with a gang of fifty troops around it, straining to heave it up onto the road.

"Ah, thees war," the captain murmured, "eet ees not nice."

"Boy, you said a mouthful," Donaldson retorted. "Most as much as Sherman."

III

WHEN he had been fighting the dark, rain, cold, and traffic for two hours, Donaldson suddenly ran out into comparative calm. Rumble and congestion died away behind him.

The drumming guns sounded faintly far off. Clear spaces appeared in which he dared to speed up to twelve or fifteen miles an hour with only occasional interruptions from on-coming military impedimenta.

He found himself moving over a smoother road, entering the outskirts of a town whose ghostly houses at right and left did not seem to present the torn and irregular outlines of the heavily shelled villages of the front. Suddenly Moiret touched his arm, and motioned toward a shadowy group of long, low buildings sitting back a few feet on the right.

"We are arrive," the Frenchman said. "Thees ees the hospital."

Donaldson stopped the motor cycle, and they dismounted, pushing the vehicle before them as they sought an entrance. A sentinel in blue halted them, and, after a few words in rapid-fire French between him and Moiret, he motioned to Donaldson to leave his motor cycle under a tree, and conducted them to a door.

No lights shone from any of the buildings, and Donaldson understood that they were, therefore, still in the zone of possible air raids. Inside, however, was light in plenty, and, even more welcome, a soft, infolding warmth from wood stoves at either end of a long room, which was lined with cots on each side, and about which moved tender-eyed women in the graceful costumes of the French Red Cross.

Most of the patients, Donaldson saw, were French poilus, bearded and black-eyed, but he also noted that two or three pairs of keen American eyes, in clean-shaven faces, turned eagerly in his direction. He slowly drew his gloves from his half-frozen fingers and started toward one of the stoves, when his attention was arrested by a striking group of people at the other end of the room.

Moiret took him silently by the elbow and guided him between the rows of cots until they came beside it. Donaldson

looked at his companion, and was surprised to find him standing rigidly at attention.

Just then the group, consisting of nurses and patients, with canes or crutches, parted to give him a view of the object of their interest, and he saw John Loring, propped up by an extra pillow, gazing into the eyes of a tall, rugged French officer of advanced age and apparently high rank, to judge by the splendor of his uniform.

Fascinated and curious, Donaldson watched the elderly officer lean over and pin something on the bandages which covered Loring's left breast. He saw a smile of beatific calm spread over the American's face, to be followed a moment later by a blush as the Frenchman bowed solemnly and kissed him, first on one cheek and then on the other.

When the officer turned away slowly, spoke quietly to a nurse beside him, and, with firm, military tread, walked rapidly from the room, Captain Moiret clicked one heel against the other, threw his head back proudly, brought his right hand sharply to the side of his cap, palm outward, in the French salute, and rigidly held the position until the door had closed behind the stranger.

"Who was that?" Donaldson asked.

"Zat," Moiret cried with a ringing voice, "ees a field marshal of France. A hundred kilometers ees not too great for him to drive to pin his own *Medaille Militaire* upon zee breast of your hero, John Loring. Zee highest honor for valor in zee world, *mon commandant!* Wizzout any red tape! What you zink of zose damn frogs now, eh?"

Without answering, Donaldson moved quietly to the side of Loring's cot. At his approach the soldier smiled up to him hopefully, and, lifting his head weakly, and turning his eyes toward his breast, proudly called attention to his gleaming medal, reserved by a wisely discriminating government for conspicuously heroic soldiers of the ranks, or field marshals who have reached the uttermost heights of military achievement.

"Ain't it—pretty?" Loring asked, in a voice that betrayed the slender thread by which he still clung to life.

"It's wonderful," Donaldson agreed. "There's only one other as beautiful. That's our own Distinguished Service Cross and you're going to—to have one!"

"I'll be glad," the soldier whispered.

"I don't mind going—but—mother told me—to do—my duty. And if they—give me a cross—she'll know—I tried."

"You did a thousand times more than your duty, and I wish there was some way I could make you know how I feel—how we all feel—the whole division. We're so proud of you we don't talk about anything else at headquarters."

"When—when—do you suppose—they'll give it to me?" Loring asked. "I feel—pretty bad—sometimes, but I'm—going to stay—till I get it."

"I'm on my way to G. H. Q. to get it for you now," Donaldson replied, fired with confidence in his ability to perform his self-imposed mission.

A nurse touched Donaldson on the arm and motioned him away, so he smiled down at Loring, clasped his own hands together, and moved them as if shaking hands. The soldier understood, smiled back, and nodded his head.

"I'll—be—waiting," he murmured, closing his eyes.

Donaldson stopped only a moment to say good-by to the little French captain, and to thank him for the kindly act of his great officer.

"It's the finest thing I ever heard of," he declared.

Moiret waved a lighted cigarette with a gesture of dismissal, shrugged his shoulders again, and said laconically:

"*C'est la guerre.*"

"Nevertheless," Donaldson remarked, "I wish to God we had some of that kind of stuff in our outfit. It'd help us get through the rest of it."

"You will learn," the other said, as Donaldson strode quickly to the door and out into the cold dark. Refilling his gasoline tank from the hospital's supply, the major remounted his motor cycle and dived into the darkness ahead of him, more determined than ever to wring an American decoration for Private Loring out of the hard-hearted bureaucrats at G. H. Q.

IV

ON and on through the night he sped, heedless now of possible collision, trusting to luck and the virtue of his cause to see him through. Twice he was stopped by gates at railroad crossings, where he completely exhausted his scant supply of French invective before he could get the gate tender up to let him through.

He was challenged alternately by French and American sentinels as he noisily tore through towns that falsely looked as if they were deserted, and once, as he roared past, a shot followed him, but he only drove the faster to eat up the miles that lay between him and his goal.

Shivering M. P.'s at dangerous cross-roads demanded his credentials and warned him against shell fire from long range guns, but he talked them out of their protests with reportorial fervor, and got by. Bar le Duc and Toul were as dark as the bottom of a well, but he wormed his way through, managed to find the road again, and went on.

A spectacular air raid by a half dozen German planes was in full blast as he swept through sacred Domremy, the birthplace of Joan of Arc. Fritz was dropping eggs all over the place, and the bursts were tearing up the streets and fields on all sides of him.

Machine guns in some of the planes played a violent tattoo, and bullets spattered around him like hail; but he lowered his head, shot up his speed, breathed a hopeful prayer, and held the machine to the dim ribbon of road unwinding beneath his eyes.

A few kilometers below Neufchateau Donaldson flashed on his headlight, slowed down to a stop, dismounted, and ran up and down for ten minutes to warm his chilled body. He slapped his arms about him as he had seen coal wagon drivers do to warm themselves, when he was a boy.

Then he looked at his wrist watch and was gratified to find that daylight was nearly due. He felt that his troubles, so far as the journey was concerned, were nearly over; so he smoked a cigarette, remounted his machine, and proceeded, his way well illuminated by his bright headlight, which could now be used in safety and without violation of military orders.

As the gray dawn appeared in the east, the cold drizzle which had fallen for days ceased, and Major Donaldson marveled at the quiet beauty of the country through which he passed. Snug, substantial villages dotted every hilltop. Houses had roofs and walls.

Chimneys stood intact, and from some of them thin curls of smoke appeared. The road was broad and smooth.

Trees had graceful branches and leaves, instead of bare and shattered arms. The

fields stretched out before his eye in symmetrical, geometric figures, with flourishing crops growing upon them.

Nowhere did he see a shell hole, a bare, white, pock-marked hillside, a tangle of barbed wire, or a shell-battered wall. And the utter peace and quiet soothed his soul.

He could almost feel the silence, although his ears still hummed from the booming of cannon which had assailed them for what seemed to him, in thinking back over it, his entire lifetime.

His attention was suddenly attracted by a pleasing sound. For a moment he could not identify it, and then he knew it was a bird, chirping to the dawning.

"Funny," he mused, "I never thought of it before, but the thing that makes the front so awful is that it's so unnatural—no birds, no dogs or cats, no cows. No wonder those dodos down at G. H. Q., living in this sort of atmosphere, can't get it."

An hour later, in broad daylight, Donaldson swung round a wide curve, dropped down a long, steep hill, shot across a narrow steel bridge, and came suddenly to a stop where a stout wooden gate barred his way up another hill to a sizable town whose church spires and larger buildings he could discern above him. From a small stone house beside the road an American dough-boy appeared, with a gun on his shoulder.

"Hey, buddy, what you doin' in so early?" he called through the gate to the young major, whose rank was effectually concealed by his slicker, his dirty trench boots, and his three days' growth of beard.

A gold oakleaf glimmered through the mud on the front of the overseas cap, however, and the M. P.—a sergeant—suddenly caught sight of it, snapped into attention, and executed a rifle salute. Donaldson returned the salute and, as the soldier shifted to port arms, asked:

"Is this Chaumont?"

"Yes, sir," the M. P. replied. "I beg your pardon, sir; I thought you were a courier, sir."

"That's all right. Where I came from it's sometimes hard to recognize an officer. I'm on my way to G. H. Q. to see the commander in chief."

"Yes, sir. Come right through, sir."

The sergeant swung back the gate, and Donaldson mounted his motor cycle, and shot through.

"Your orders, sir?" the M. P. called after him, starting forward to follow him.

"Haven't got time," Donaldson called over his shoulder, and speeded up the hill. No attempt was made to stop him, although he passed a number of other soldiers bearing the brassard of the military police on their left arms, and he looked about as he rode on.

So this quiet spot was the brain center from which radiated the military genius which was winning the war. It was eight o'clock; and by that time, at the front, the day's business of slaughter had already been under way for two hours.

He asked the next M. P. he encountered how to get to G. H. Q., and was directed to a great, barnlike affair only a block away on his left. Here a four-story stone building, with wide interior porches, occupied three sides of a square, leaving a broad gravel area in the center. On the fourth side, formed by the street, ran an iron fence fifteen feet high, with enormous gates in its center.

Donaldson learned later that the structure, before the war, had been a French infantry barracks, but had been turned over to the A. E. F. in 1917 for General Headquarters.

It looked as if it would house a thousand men, and Donaldson wondered how many favored American staff officers were now enjoying its quiet security. What chiefly concerned him, however, was its appearance of desertion. Not a human being was in sight, and not a sound came from its apparently empty interior.

Donaldson soon learned, from a soldier in a sentry box just inside the gates, that there was ample reason for the air of desertion at G. H. Q. The hour still lacked fifteen minutes of nine o'clock, and it was not until then that the four hundred diligent officers on duty at Chaumont took up their daily task of whipping the Germans.

In the meantime he ascertained the location of the offices of the decorations board, and the identity of its chief, Brigadier General Frederick Lansing.

He parked his motor cycle, thought hopelessly about how good a cup of coffee would taste, and made his way into the gloomy building to wait for the man who had perpetrated the outrage upon Private John Loring.

V

PROMPTLY at nine, General Lansing and his staff of assistants arrived. Donaldson's

spirits arose as he observed their business-like appearance and manner.

The general looked like a regular fellow. He was six feet tall, straight and slender, with broad, flat shoulders; he appeared confident and alert of movement, and had direct, intelligent eyes. Donaldson put him down for about sixty years of age, and hoped the general had kept his mind as vigorous as his body.

Rising, the young major stood at attention, waiting to be asked his business; but the general strode past him to the next room, apparently oblivious of his presence, while a young lieutenant waited respectfully to close the door behind the important personage.

John Loring's patient smile flashed before Donaldson's eyes for an instant at the left-handed cordiality of his reception, and the next moment he had opened the closed door and stepped inside the general's private office.

He saluted the man now seated behind a flat-topped desk, and then moved forward until he faced him across its systematically arranged office paraphernalia. The general looked him over calmly and slowly. Finally he spoke, quietly, almost disinterestedly.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Major Donaldson, sir," the young officer replied, "adjutant of the —th Division."

"What do you want?"

"I want Private Loring's Distinguished Service Cross, sir."

An expression of annoyance passed over the general's face.

"This is very irregular," he said. "I don't recall the case. See Colonel Jones, in the other room."

"I'm sorry, sir, but Colonel Jones won't do," Donaldson declared, as the general turned his attention to his desk, evidently in the belief that his caller had been dismissed. "Private Loring is dying, and we've got to have quick action."

The general looked up as if in surprise at finding Donaldson still in the room.

"Let me see your orders," he commanded, holding out his hand.

"I have no orders, sir," Donaldson replied.

"Did not your division commander send you here?"

"No, sir—I just came. You see, sir, we were so disappointed and surprised

when Loring's cross was disapproved that I volunteered to come right down here and explain the circumstances of the case. I knew that if you really understood what had happened you'd let me have a cross so that I could get back with it in time to give it to Loring before he dies."

"This is most irregular," the general said, for the first time displaying a sense of concern by his words and manner. "Do you realize now that you are liable to arrest and court-martial?"

"The orders covering the movement of casual officers are specific. No one may leave the zone of his command without proper authority from the headquarters qualified to issue it.

"I am surprised that your division commander, for whose military efficiency I have always had the highest opinion, should tolerate a spirit of carelessness in his organization that makes possible such a serious violation of official regulations."

"But this is an exceptional case, sir," Donaldson protested. "Loring is dying, and—"

"But on the contrary," the general declared, with rising inflection, "it is one of the most flagrant breaches of military discipline that has ever come under my observation in my whole career in the service."

"Orders are made to be obeyed. The army could not function without regulations covering every detail of operations. Our general orders are most painstakingly evolved, from long years of patient study on the part of men who have devoted their lives to the problem, plus a full year of observation here, and analysis of the three years' experience of our allies."

"But, general, there comes a time in every situation when the part of wisdom, efficiency, and humanity calls for departure from the regular routine. I—"

"In civil life, yes," the general agreed. "In the army, no. I take it that you are one of our recent acquisitions from the civilian training camps?"

"Yes, sir," Donaldson replied, "but that has nothing to do with—"

The other waved his protest aside with a weary gesture.

"That, of course," he said, "explains your attitude. You cannot, naturally, after a few months' smattering of military training, appreciate the rigid requirements of the business of war, in which there is no place for sentiment.

"I can understand your impulsive action in leaving your own military area without proper authority, and I am broad enough to make allowances for it; but I cannot overlook your negligence in calling upon a general officer in your present condition. When did you last shave, sir?"

Donaldson's hand went up to his chin and fingered the stubble it found there.

"I—I don't remember, sir," he replied, hesitant from surprise rather than from embarrassment. "About four days ago, I think. Why?"

"The American army, Major Donaldson, seeks to breed officers and gentlemen," Lansing announced, "and an officer and gentleman shaves every morning, no matter where he is or how arduous his military duties. He also makes a point of the neatness and correctness of his uniform, especially when paying an official visit to a superior.

"The effect of an officer's personal appearance on the morale of the enlisted troops of any army is well known. A sloppy officer has sloppy troops, and *vice versa*. Furthermore, trench boots are only authorized in the zone of combat. General Orders 352-C cover the point definitely."

"I never thought of an unimportant detail like that, sir," Donaldson explained. "I left the zone of combat after dark—"

"Then you should have changed your boots, or brought along a pair of shoes and puttees to put on when you entered this area," the general replied.

"I'm exceedingly sorry, sir," Donaldson said, "but can't we forget such little irregularities for a few minutes, and just talk out this Loring matter like two human beings who are both concerned for their country's honor?"

"It is most irregular," the general protested. "Your division commander should have taken the case up through channels, by proper indorsement, returning the papers for reconsideration, in conformity with regulations, but— Well, I suppose we simply have to endure such things, and shut our eyes to the inefficiency of the personnel that has been thrust upon us."

VI

"THANK you, sir," Major Donaldson murmured. He had been standing throughout the conversation, and felt his legs beginning to tremble from the long physical strain to which he had been subjected.

He caught a look of surprise in the general's eyes as he drew a chair up beside the desk and seated himself without permission, but ignored it, and plunged into a dramatic recital of John Loring's heroic sacrifice.

Donaldson felt that he was telling the story well, but when he mentioned the hand grenade, General Lansing interrupted him.

"Ah, yes," he said calmly, "I recall the case. Heroic, beyond question, but, unfortunately, quite outside the regulations governing the award of the Distinguished Service Cross. I think I called the attention of the division commander, in indorsement, to General Orders 599-B, which clearly explain why I was compelled to disapprove the recommendation."

"Yes, sir," Donaldson replied, "we read your indorsement, sir, but we didn't know what 599-B was."

"Why didn't you look it up in your file of general orders, in division headquarters?"

"We didn't have any."

"What! No file of general orders! Impossible!"

For the first time since Donaldson entered the room the general revealed genuine emotion. He was stirred to his depths.

"I am shocked, sir!" he exclaimed. "I never dreamed such laxity could exist, even in these slack times."

Donaldson explained the German shell.

"You should have kept a duplicate file, sir, in some secure place," the general declared, "or you should, immediately upon destruction of your one file, have dispatched a courier to corps headquarters for another."

"A division, sir, cannot move without a file of general orders. It cannot advance, retire, feed its men, bring up its ammunition, or execute any of its other operations so vital to the success of its mission without daily access to regulations laid down for the guidance of its commander and his staff."

Donaldson waited until his superior officer had digested this latest evidence of inefficiency, and then asked:

"May I see the order now, sir?"

For answer, the general picked up a thick, compact, loose-leaf book, carefully opened it with his finger end where a slip of paper was inserted in it, and turned to his caller with serious expression.

"The Distinguished Service Cross," he explained, while Donaldson's mind went back to the mud and rain and cold, and roaring din of the front, and to John Loring's pale face against the white pillows, "was created by act of Congress, which specified that it might be awarded to officers or men of the American army or of the armies of her allies for—I am quoting the law now: 'Extraordinary heroism in action against an enemy of the United States.'"

With an air of finality General Lansing closed the book, and carefully replaced it in the exact position it had previously occupied on his orderly desk.

"That quotation is contained in General Orders No. 599-B," he continued. "If you, or your chief of staff, or your division commander had ever read it, you would not, of course, have recommended the award of a cross to Private Loring in the first place. It was to avoid such unnecessary paper work in the future, both at your division headquarters and here, that I called your attention to the paragraph."

"I guess I'm pretty dumb, general," Donaldson said. "I don't see it yet. It seems to me that 599-B screams aloud for a Distinguished Service Cross for John Loring."

"I don't see how there could be a more striking case of extraordinary heroism than his. He threw himself on that hand grenade to smother it—to take the whole force of the explosion himself—to give his own life to save ours."

"He was the only one of us who had the brains to think of it, and the courage to do it. The rest of us were petrified with horror because we knew that in another second we'd be blown to kingdom come."

"I do not decry the heroism of his deed," the general replied. "The point is that the act of Congress limits the cross to men who display extraordinary heroism 'in action' against an enemy of the United States."

"Loring was not 'in action' in the sense contemplated by the statute. He was with an advance detachment, occupying a front trench at a time when there was no 'action' in operation, in the strict military sense of the term."

"Technically speaking, that part of the line at that particular time was a defensive sector only. There had been an official operation against the enemy the day be-

fore, under properly transmitted orders, which had placed the troops of which Loring was a part 'in action.'

"The day following his accident there was an attack by the enemy, which was repulsed. He might accurately have been described as 'in action' upon that occasion had he been present with his command.

"On the day in question, however, there was neither offensive nor defensive activity, and Loring was not, therefore, 'in action,' as stipulated by the act of Congress. You see, I investigated this case thoroughly before passing upon it.

"All this, you may say, is hair-splitting. You may contend that the mere presence of a soldier in a front line trench automatically places him 'in action.' I can conceive that, under unusual circumstances, such a construction of the law might be justified, but it could not be applied to Loring.

"The fact that it was an American, and not a German, hand grenade, shows conclusively, when studied in the light of the day's events, that Loring was not actually 'in action' against an enemy of the United States.'

"I am sorry to disappoint you, but that is my final judgment, reached after the most painstaking consideration of all the circumstances of the case."

"But it was dark, general," Donaldson protested, "just before dawn, and we heard a noise that sounded like a raiding party. The corporal in charge of the squad jumped up to heave a grenade, and just as he brought his arm back he dropped the bomb and it started rolling toward us.

"The raiding party that we imagined we heard was just as real to us as if it had actually been there—and it may have been at that. There may have been Germans out there who beat it when they heard that hand grenade go off.

"And the Mills bomb was just as menacing and just as certain to kill us, whether it was American or German. I don't see that your point detracts one whit from Loring's heroism."

"Of course it doesn't," the general answered, "because it has nothing to do with Loring's heroism whatever. It simply makes clear the letter of the law, which tells us plainly when we may and when we may not award a Distinguished Service Cross.

"In Loring's case it tells us we may not, because, at the time he displayed extraordinary heroism, he was not 'in action' against an enemy of the United States."

Major Donaldson stared at General Lansing with helpless, silent rage. What could he do? How could he break through the confident, regulation-bound crust of this ancient, detail-loving gentleman of the old army, who must have a heart hidden somewhere down in the innermost recesses of his precedent-toughened exterior.

Lansing, Donaldson realized, was thinking in terms of two company posts, dress parades, leisurely practice marches, and slow promotion while the enemy was pounding many thousands of liberty-loving American boys to pieces up beyond the northern hills.

Donaldson's mind flew back to his first big football game, when he and his sturdy comrades had been beaten back and back by superior weight until they stood within the shadow of their own goal posts. Again he heard the stirring chant of his own stands, "Hold 'em! Hold 'em! Hold 'em!" and for a moment he again felt the sickening fear of defeat that had gripped him that day and almost brought him to his knees.

He squared his shoulders, however, as recollection came of the fight he had made—of the punishment endured to hold the opposite side, regain the ball, and hammer with every bit of muscle, nerve, and energy, inch by inch, to the winning touchdown.

The glow of victory in that early experience came back to him now, and he edged his chair closer to General Lansing's desk, and pleaded for John Loring with the fervor of a zealot in his voice and eyes. He threw himself recklessly and wholeheartedly into his appeal, with all the argument, reason, and logic he could command.

Basing his case first on the effect which the bestowal of the cross would have on the worn-out men of the division, he extended it to consideration of the legal technicalities raised by the general, branched out into a dramatic account of crushing actualities of the front line hell, described the moving scene he had himself witnessed at the hospital, sought to shame the general by the generous attitude of the French, and concluded, at the end of half an hour, with a plea for human sympathy for the dying soldier and his distant mother.

Lansing listened to the recital without interruption or change of expression, but at its end he arose and walked slowly to a north window which looked out toward the soft green hills, beyond which was raging the agonizing torture of war, of which he knew nothing except by hearsay.

Donaldson watched him intently, hopeful that he had jarred the old soldier out of his complacent certainty in his own opinion. Five minutes passed; ten minutes passed, and still the general stood at the window, his back to the eloquent young division adjutant.

Donaldson removed his eyes from the broad, flat shoulders, and looked about the room. Then his gaze fell on the desk, and he caught his breath as he saw a glittering object, almost at his elbow.

He looked closely, and knew, although he had never seen one before, that it was a Distinguished Service Cross. He glanced quickly at the general's back, snatched up the cross silently, buttoned it in his pocket, leaned back in his chair, and breathed a soft sigh of relief.

Just then General Lansing turned, and strode rapidly back to his desk without looking toward his visitor. He picked up the top one of a neat pile of papers lying in the center of his blotter, and began to read it.

"You may go, major," he said, in his characteristic, even voice. "My decision stands. It is final."

VII

MAJOR DONALDSON arose jauntily. Disappointment and heartbreak were past. He had failed in his appeal, but—he had a cross for Private John Loring! Nobody could stop him now. The red tape was cut. The stuffed shirts were punctured.

Lumbering, stumbling G. H. Q. could go its stupid way. He was through. His mission was executed. He was going back—back where only realities counted, where men had hearts, where human sympathy flowed from valiant breasts, where soldiers fought and smiled and toiled and sacrificed and died, without worship of little printed regulations in little, neatly covered books.

He marched out of General Lansing's office with his heart singing. He ran lightly downstairs, and strode happily across the big area. Halfway to his parked motor cycle he halted. He had forgotten that he had no orders.

General Lansing, hard-boiled although he was, would undoubtedly cause proper credentials to be issued to him if he asked for them, in order to facilitate his return to his division.

But he shook his head and went on. He would ask no favors. He had got through the night before, and his hand proudly patted his blouse pocket over the precious object reposing there. He would get back, by the mercy of his God, as he had come.

He trundled out his motor cycle, inquired the way to the motor park, rode there, filled up his gas tank, stopped at a Salvation Army hut long enough to eat a hasty dinner, and rolled out of G. H. Q., desperately anxious to speed back to the hospital where John Loring bravely awaited his return. He hoped to reach it by dark.

As Donaldson roared through the peaceful country he contemplated his act of robbery. What would they do to him if he were discovered? He would be court-martialed. That was certain. He might be shot at sunrise! They might demote him, or send him home. They might even send him to duty in the S O S.

He didn't care. He would take his medicine, whatever it was, and he thought, with an inward chuckle, that he could even make it palatable with the sauce of the newspaper story which he might whisper into the always hungry ear of one of his journalistic friends with the army.

He had little fear of unpleasant consequences, however. In the first place, Lansing would hardly suspect him; outright theft of sacred government property by an officer of the American army was something which would probably never enter his mind.

In the second place, Donaldson thought there would be little likelihood of the facts being traced through Loring. The soldier was in a French hospital, whose records were notoriously jumbled. If he lived, the A. E. F. would probably lose all track of him until the war was over.

But, Donaldson told himself, with a catch in his throat, Loring would probably die and the French would bury him, with sentiment and ceremony, his Distinguished Service Cross on his breast beside his *Médaille Militaire*.

The young major, therefore, dismissed speculation from his mind, and bent to the task of making mileage.

His good fortune, which had ridden with him through the previous night and sat beside him at G. H. Q., soon deserted him, however. His motor cycle began to show signs of distress, and finally it stopped altogether.

He nursed it back into operating form only at a costly delay of half an hour, and by the time he reached Neufchateau it had gone dead. He lost another hour with the mechanics at the A. E. F. motor park there, and the early darkness of a cloudy fall evening caught him before he had made Ligny en Barrois.

Here he was held up another hour by argument over his authority to be away from his division. He finally succeeded in convincing the commanding officer of the area that he was neither a deserter nor a German spy, and was permitted to proceed on his way.

An hour later he could distinguish the roar of cannon at the front and catch occasional flashes made by the guns of larger caliber, miles away beyond the hills ahead of him. He was again in the zone of darkness, where lights were taboo, not because of a regulation printed in a book, but because of the quickening sense of self-preservation—the necessity which every man could see and feel.

He soon came upon a winding train of trucks, blindly toiling to the front with shells and food, and he spent half an hour maneuvering himself past it, only to run into a brigade of heavies, lumbering forward under tractor power, filling the road, and deafening the neighborhood with their clank and roar.

Another half hour was wasted going one kilometer, and he was about to pass the leading tractor at the head of the line, into what he hoped would prove an open road, when he felt a sudden, rending jar at the rear of his machine, and was pitched headlong over the handlebars into a ditch.

He got dizzily to his feet, and looked up in time to see a huge, dark limousine lurch partly into the ditch ahead of him, sway for a moment, and then regain the road, shoot forward ahead of the crawling guns, and disappear in the darkness.

An artillery lieutenant threw his flash-lamp into Donaldson's face, and then directed it to the wreck of his motor cycle, in the ditch beside him, smashed beyond repair.

"Another damned staff car," the lieu-

tenant said. "They'd just as lief kill you as not. Didn't even stop to see if you were hurt."

"I don't care a hoot in hell for that part of it," Donaldson cried, "but, great guns, look at my motor cycle! I've been held up and held up, and I've just got to go on, some way."

"What's your outfit?" the lieutenant asked, as they walked along beside the grinding guns.

"The —th Division, but I've got to stop at that French hospital in Beaumere."

"You're in luck, major," the lieutenant said. "It's only a kilometer up the line. I passed it this morning."

"Lord, I'm glad of that," Donaldson replied. "I can hoof it that far. Much obliged. Good luck."

"Good luck," the lieutenant called out, as Donaldson quickened his step and left the heavies behind him, keyed up with hope of finding Loring still alive, and with joy at the prospect of making good his promise to bring the boy his reward.

He hurried through the night, passing several units of a green division, moving up to the front, awed by the noise and flashing lights ahead of them, but he was not lucky enough to encounter any vehicular traffic on which he might beg a ride.

The troops were still winding along the road when he came to his destination, and, as he peered at the group of buildings to get his bearings, he saw a familiar-looking limousine drawn off the road, standing about where he had parked his motor cycle the night before.

He hurried around it, and found its left front fender freshly dented and scratched, and he turned his flash light into the face of a soldier driver sitting behind the wheel.

"You're the son of a gun that hit me down the road where you passed those tractors, aren't you?" the major demanded.

The soldier blinked at the light, and tried to look around it at the figure holding it.

"I'm sorry, sir, if I hit you," he said; "it was awful dark. I felt a bump, but I had to watch my steering. Thought I was going into the ditch myself. I wanted to stop and go back, but the general wouldn't let me. He'd been crowding me all the way from G. H. Q. Said it was a matter of life and death. Hope I didn't hurt you, sir."

"Who are you driving for?"

"General Lansing, sir."

"Who?" Donaldson repeated, numbly. He had heard the name clearly, but there was a horrid shock in the conviction that the G. H. Q. authority had outpaced him to uphold the rule of red tape.

"General Lansing, sir," the driver repeated. "I never saw anybody in such a hurry. We came up here hell bent for leather, smashing through everything, with him hammering on the glass every minute and yelling at me to go 'faster, faster, faster.' I don't know what it's all about."

VIII

MAJOR DONALDSON snapped off his light and walked unsteadily to the door of the hospital. He pushed it open slowly, stepped in, and closed it behind him.

Again he observed a striking group about the cot of Private John Loring. The same French nurses hovered near. The same poilus on canes and crutches stood beside the bed, watching the scene with shining eyes, but on this occasion there was no field marshal of France, in brilliant blue and gold uniform, with rows and rows of colored ribbons across his left breast.

Instead, there stood by John Loring's cot a tall, straight American officer in olive-drab khaki, with a single star on each shoulder. He was speaking; and Donaldson stood statue-like, listening amazedly.

"I am proud to stand at your bedside, John Loring," came to Donaldson's ears in the even voice of Brigadier General Frederick Lansing. "I am proud to kneel beside you in humble reverence, and, in the name of the President of the United States, award to you the Distinguished Service Cross in recognition of your extraordinary heroism."

Donaldson fought to keep down the lump in his throat as he saw the dignified general kneel, and, with hands that trembled, pin the D. S. C. on Loring's bandages, above the *Medaille Militaire* of a field marshal of France. The major gave up, then, and let the tears course down his cheeks as Loring's faint voice came to his ears.

"I—knew—they'd—send it," he faltered. "Our—adjutant—promised—and—the boys—of the —th Division—always—make—good. Now—now—I'm—ready—to—go."

The nurse who had motioned Donaldson away from Loring's cot the night before again touched him on the arm. Her eyes were starry.

"*Pas la mort,*" she whispered, as she noted the tears on the young officer's cheeks. "Ze doctaire say he get well."

Before Donaldson could speak, General Lansing had turned away from the bed and started across the room toward the door. As had Captain Moiret, the night before, nearly burst with pride when his great marshal passed out of the hospital, so Donaldson felt something big surge up within his breast and bring him to rigid attention.

Like the Frenchman, he clicked one heel against the other, threw back his shoulders, lifted his head, and brought his hand up to the right side of his cap in salute.

Lansing halted in front of him and looked him over from head to foot. Donaldson stared past the general at the opposite wall until he could stand the scrutiny no longer.

Slowly he brought his eyes to his superior, and his heart almost missed a beat at what he saw. The faintest suggestion of tenderness played about the corners of the general's mouth.

"Damn you, Donaldson," he said genially. "Give me that cross! I don't care what an old field marshal did, but no young major is going to bestow decorations if I can help it. Discipline must be preserved, my boy!"

"Then I can see myself being court-martialed," Major Donaldson remarked soberly, as he handed over the purloined decoration.

"The hell you can!" was the dignified disclaimer made by Brigadier General Lansing as he strode smilingly out into the night.

AFTER TWO YEARS

THE speeding ship, the crowd, the lights, the flowers;
The Latin speech like music to the ear,
The sea's low song through all the quiet hours;
These are the same—only you are not here.

Lena Whittaker Blakeney

The Hard-Boiled Egoist

IT IS ONLY IN CHINA THAT A STREET BEGGAR COULD HAVE
HUMBLED THE SPIRIT OF THIS TYPICAL MULTI-
MILLIONAIRE, EZRA HAMMERLY

By George F. Worts

SYLVIA contemplated the young man dreamily. Wyndham Shaw interested her more than any admirer she had ever gone with, and in the two weeks she had known him in this Chinese seaport, he had grown almost indispensable to her.

There was so much about him that she liked and approved of. Their tastes were very similar, and they laughed at the same jokes. She liked the sort of people he liked, and she was bored by the sort of people who bored him.

He danced well, talked entertainingly, laughed easily, and was splendidly handsome. He was a tall, slender young man with dazzling blue eyes, a fine strong chin, and skin the color of the sails of a Chinese junk, which is a rich reddish-brown.

Aside from the fact that he was extremely attractive, there was very little that Sylvia knew about him. His business, whatever it was, took him frequently into the interior of China, but he never talked about his business, and he somehow evaded all inquiries bearing upon the subject.

She was not greatly interested in that side of him, anyhow. Men who talked about their business bored her. She believed that the place for business was in an office, not in a theater or at a tea table. His mystery made him even more attractive.

They had spent a delightful afternoon, strolling down the Shanghai water front, and dropping into little shops to price amber and rose quartz and jade, and now they were having tea together at the hotel. He had been talking in his easy, pleasant way about jade.

"Now, this," he said, fishing in his vest pocket and producing a small flat piece of kingfisher jade, "was made in the Ming

period. I'm absolutely hipped on Ming, you know. Chinese art curled up and died when the Manchus came in."

He was balancing it on the finger tips of his upturned hand.

"It's a butterfly!" Sylvia exclaimed.

Wyndham Shaw nodded.

"The butterfly is a symbol of successful love," he said, "and when a young Chinese gets into his courting clothes, he usually has one of these stowed away somewhere. I wonder if you wouldn't accept this as a little souvenir of our friendship."

Sylvia came down to earth with something of a thud. The piece of green jade was lying on the white tablecloth between them. She had been conscious all afternoon of a strain on the young man, and now she supposed he was going to do his stuff.

"Wyndham," she said sternly, "is this your subtle way of proposing to me? I think it's terribly original, if that's what you're getting around to."

"If you weren't your father's daughter," he replied promptly, "I'd say a lot of things."

"Because he doesn't approve of you?"

"I know how much he dislikes me."

"Listen, Windy; you keep right on liking me, understand? He hasn't approved of any man I've ever gone with. He's hated all my beaux. He's done everything under the sun to discourage every man who's ever liked me. Don't tell me you'd stop at a little thing like that."

"I am going to Hankow on to-night's train," the young man announced resolutely.

"You're running away," she accused him.

"No," he said. "I'm going back to

work. It's my imagination that's been running away."

"And you aren't coming back!" she wailed. "Windy, if you walk out on me like this—"

"Your father," he interrupted, "has been standing over there by the cigar stand for a half hour, and there's a gallon of cyanide in every glance he sends my way. No, Sylvia; I'm not afraid of him, I'm only afraid of what people would say if I were presumptuous enough to ask Ezra Hammerly for his daughter."

"You don't ask Ezra Hammerly for his daughter," Sylvia argued. "You ask his daughter."

"I'm going to Hankow," the determined young martyr repeated.

"But what about this jade butterfly?"

"It's a souvenir of delightful memories."

"You just told me it was a symbol of successful love! I think that's a lovely idea. I'm going to wear it on a silver chain."

The young man was pale. Obviously, a struggle was taking place within him. It is hard to know what to do when a girl you know you have no right to love tells you, in so many words, that it is quite all right.

"Windy—" she began in an endearing voice. She did not finish the thought.

II

HER father was coming toward them. He was walking rapidly, and in his air was the briskness of a man of important affairs. Somehow, all of Ezra Hammerly's affairs were vested with this importance, even down to the buying of the fifty-cent cigars he smoked. He had a square face, iron-gray hair, and a powerful jaw.

Wyndham Shaw arose as he approached.

"You'll have to excuse her, young man," Mr. Hammerly said brusquely. "We haven't any time to waste. Hop upstairs and get your packing done, Syl."

"My packing?" Sylvia repeated.

"Yes; I've decided to take you along. I'm afraid Shanghai is too dangerous a place to leave you."

This was a deliberate thrust at Wyndham Shaw, and the young man turned a little paler.

"You're not going to take Sylvia to Nan Chang," he expostulated.

"I'd like to know why I'm not," Mr. Hammerly remarked, planting his fists on

his hips and thrusting out his jaw belligerently.

"I don't think you ought to take a girl like Sylvia to a town like Nan Chang," Mr. Shaw said boldly. "It's not only unpleasant, but it's dangerous. You know they've been having a lot of trouble up there. This whole country is apt to break out into civil war at any moment. Besides, the trip is too rough."

Hammerly gave him the hard, unpleasant smile that he reserved especially for men who spoke, as he termed it, out of turn.

"Run along, Sylvia, and get your packing done," he said.

Shaw brought his lips together. There was nothing for him to do but retreat. He bowed to Mr. Hammerly and said goodbye to Sylvia. He turned and started away.

"Windy," she called in a choked voice, "won't I see you again?"

"No," the young man answered.

"Thank God for that," said Mr. Hammerly.

His well-known steam roller tactics had, as usual, won. Ezra was a jealous, selfish, lonely man; he had sensed that Sylvia was on the verge of falling in love with the young man, and he was sure that the trip to Nan Chang would put him out of her mind. Shaw was the first man in whom Sylvia had shown a really serious interest, and her father handled the situation with the only methods that he knew.

He was perfectly aware that it was no trip for a girl accustomed to the refinements of this exceedingly refined civilization. But he would not withdraw his command, so Sylvia set her wrist watch back four thousand years and meekly accompanied him.

III

It was a pretty dreary business. When they disembarked from the river steamer at Ichang, they left modern civilization behind them. They rode on donkeys. They ate stuff out of cans.

Day after day they rode through pelting rain or smothering fog. Occasionally a black or yellow mountain thrust its stark shoulders above the clouds and touched them with its majestic solemnity, but there was very little romance along this hard road.

And Sylvia found one upcountry Chinese town very like another; collections of

squat houses, narrow, filthy streets, oceans of yellow faces, all alike; faded blue garments, rags, beggars; a sour smell of unclean humanity, of sewage improperly disposed of. Maybe there was romance here, but you had to dig deep for it.

Hammerly became glum. At the best of times he was not a charming traveling companion. Hardships worried him, irritated him; the rains and fogs took all the starch out of him. The language annoyed him.

He loathed China; he detested the natives; he despised the customs; he gagged on the food; he spent sleepless, agonized nights between scratchy, damp blankets. He even talked of turning back.

But he went on. He was a driver, the kind of man who has made America into the strange, madly hurrying, jazzed-up country that it is. Such Americans do not turn back; they carry the banner to victory.

When there is no train, they charter a special one; when a man resists them, they smash him. Marvelous machines, composed of money and men, execute their orders. They are the conquering heroes of to-day. And the Sylvias watch and adore them.

But in the interior of China, Ezra Hammerly was helpless. There was no magical machine to obey him. He was thwarted by a civilization so old that it was atrophied. How he hated China!

A morning dawned clear, with not a cloud in the sky or a wisp of fog hanging over the land. A forest stretched out from their encampment and swept in mighty green waves up the side of a mountain. A torrent sang. Even tinned food was palatable this morning.

They reached their mecca shortly before sundown. Nan Chang was a fabled city. It nestled in a cup in the yellow and black hills, as disorderly a city as the rest of them, as dirty a city as the others, but the tile roofs were vermilion, and there was a clean blue river speeding past.

Yang Foo's tavern was not labeled as such. It was hardly more than a caravansary—a small stone building set in the center of a large compound surrounded by high stone walls with teakwood gates almost a foot thick.

There were stables against one wall. Dirty water flowed away from the tavern in narrow ditches of stone. Chickens and

pigs pecked and rooted for nourishment in the hoof-marked mud.

Sylvia was a novelty to Nan Chang, the first white woman to visit the city since the Tientsin massacre fifty years ago, when two of them fled through on their way to the friendly arms of India. She was a curiosity. Men and women stared at her and laughed; children audaciously touched her garments, then ran away like terrified rats.

They were not cute children, the pink-cheeked, freshly-starched children with which Sylvia was familiar. They were pathetic, sallow-faced little things, with beady eyes, dirty faces, and neglected noses. They made her remember that China was overpopulated, and growing more so every day.

There was a bat in the room in which Sylvia slept. Her father tried to catch it, to smash out its life with a stick; but the little black creature eluded him, flew into the rafters, and squeaked terrified protests.

Sylvia wrapped a hand towel about her hair, for she had grown up with the superstitious belief that bats love to tangle themselves in ladies' hair. Hers was bobbed short, but she took the precaution anyhow.

During the night there was a great hubbub, as if people were banging on dish-pans. The bedlam kept Sylvia awake most of the night, and in the morning she learned that it had been caused by priests beating on brass cymbals. A kitchen boy had died the day before, and the priests were hired to drive the devils out of the house.

IV

HAMMERLY's dislike of Chinese methods was not softened by the mining men who came to call upon him. That was the object of his visit—to ascertain whether it would pay to put money into these up-country mines.

The callers were excessively polite, but they did not wish to talk business immediately. The interpreter they brought along had worked in a Chinese restaurant in Chicago, and his English was almost unintelligible.

The first day was spent in drinking tea, smoking little metal pipes, and discussing every subject but mining. But on the second day they got down to business.

They brought maps and samples of ore,

and they answered Mr. Hammerly's questions promptly and directly. They were willing to make most generous terms.

Later they brought him presents. They also brought gifts for Sylvia—rare carved things of jade and rose quartz and amber. Their attitude implied that Ezra was a king and Sylvia a princess.

Mr. Hammerly became expansive under this benign influence. He spoke eloquently to Sylvia of the duty of the broad thinking American capitalist to these poor people, struggling in the darkness of poverty and ignorance.

He took the wretched city to his great bosom. There would be schools here, good hospitals, decent sanitation, a first-class hotel.

Sylvia was a little skeptical of her father's largeness of heart, but she agreed enthusiastically with his schemes for Americanizing Nan Chang.

"Why not let a little sunshine in?" he repeatedly wanted to know.

Then it was tactfully brought to his attention that before any sort of negotiations could be entered into regarding the mines, he must first obtain permission from the *Tuchun*, the governor of the province. Hammerly understood what that meant, and he wanted to meet the *Tuchun*, but he wanted the *Tuchun* to come to him.

Back home, Senators—yes, even Governors—came to Ezra Hammerly for favors. It was one of the rewards of success. He would not go out of his way to seek favors from any Chinaman.

The negotiations came to a halt. If the *Tuchun* wanted his palm greased, he would have to come to Mr. Hammerly. The *Tuchun*, he explained to Sylvia, was, after all, nothing but a beggar, and beggars, it seemed, were Mr. Hammerly's particular detestation—his pet aversion.

How he loathed those beggars of Nan Chang! Wherever he went they tagged him, but he did not give them so much as a *cash*. Friends in Shanghai had warned him of the upcountry beggars, the beggars' guild, which was as strong as a British trade union. Don't give them anything, they had told him, or you will let yourself in for a deuce of a lot of trouble.

Mr. Hammerly followed this advice, and the beggars followed Mr. Hammerly. Whenever he went outside the caravansary walls, beggars for whom he felt not pity, but a stomach-twisting disgust, trailed

him and made him miserable. They were dirty and blind, ragged and leprous.

They uttered piteous cries as they hobbled after him; they plucked at his sleeves with horrid bony fingers; they threw themselves down in his path. They camped on his trail in droves, squatting on their hams, their coarse woolen robes drawn about them like tents.

He learned that the beggars had no homes; that every beggar's robe was his house. In the bitter cold of a Chinese winter he would squat with his robe forming a tiny tent, of which he became the center pole, while between his feet reposed a charcoal brazier which warmed the tent and him, and on which he heated his rice and broiled such scraps as came his way.

Horrible people, these beggars! They were worse than the curs which also followed Mr. Hammerly. The curs sniffed and snarled, but the beggars devised cunning schemes to arouse his pity. They showed him open wounds and stumps where hands and feet had been; they had convulsions in his path. To them he was a fabulously rich American *tai-pan*; eventually he would take pity on them, and they awaited that moment like vultures.

One day some one shied a stone at Ezra Hammerly. The stone buzzed past a few inches from his pale, concerned nose, but quick as he was, he could not discover the thrower. He was indignant.

In view of the blessings that he was prepared to confer on these benighted people, the throwing of that stone constituted an act of *lèse majesté*. It seemed to him that Nan Chang would do well to organize a board of trade to welcome men of his importance. The mine owners fawned upon him, and they hearkened to his criticisms of China with vast respect, but that was as far as recognition went.

V

ONE afternoon he came face to face with the *Tuchun*. It was simply not Mr. Hammerly's afternoon, and fate proceeded to prove it.

Sylvia and her father were picking their way down the muddy lane which ran along the river when a man appeared on a donkey. He had once been a white man, but his skin had been burned to a ruddy brown by suns and winds. He wore a khaki helmet and khaki clothing. Mr. Hammerly did not recognize him at once.

At sight of the two Americans, the young man on the donkey quickly lifted his helmet and waved it about his head. He kicked the flanks of his sleepy mount and hastened toward them. He dismounted with a big friendly grin that revealed marvelous white teeth.

In that get-up he certainly was a handsome devil—clean-cut and strong jawed; tall and straight and slim, with eyes that were dark, warm spots of blue, full of laughter when he smiled, and a sinister kind of mischief when he didn't.

Ezra Hammerly looked at Sylvia, then he looked at Wyndham Shaw. The young man smiled pleasantly at Sylvia's spell-bound father, then he seized Sylvia's hand in his brown paw. His eyes became blue flames. Her heart, too, was suddenly riding high in her breast and thumping. She was laughing and blushing.

"Look here—" Mr. Hammerly began hoarsely, and stopped.

Sylvia became conscious of a thin, bright thread of sound. People were tramping down the muddy lane. Thump, thump, thump! The music came nearer and nearer. It was a flute. Some one coming down the lane was playing a flute.

It might have been Pan, the pagan god. One night, lying awake in the caravansary, she had heard that thin, shrill sound coming through the stillness from what distance? A Chinese flute is more Oriental than the beating of temple drums.

Only a rogue could play like that. The thin, high notes were mischievous. They were laughter, defiance, mockery. They said that life was a joke. You could imagine satyrs dancing to that flute.

Sylvia was tingling all over. She tore her gaze from Wyndham Shaw's. A palanquin was coming down the bund, three coolies in front, three coolies in back carrying the bamboo poles on their shoulder pads. The golden fringe of the vermilion canopy swayed as they walked. Chinese soldiers with rifles comprised a bodyguard.

"It's the *Tuchun*," Shaw informed the Hammerlys.

"Playing a flute while his country goes to the dogs!" Ezra exclaimed.

The flute player was now only a few feet away. He removed the instrument from his lips. He was stretched out luxuriously on blue and yellow and red cushions, a very fat, very yellow, very old man, his skullcap pushed back over one ear, the

ruby button at its peak denoting him a mandarin of the first order.

The palanquin was stopped at a word from him. He was smiling amiably at the three Americans. The coolies lowered the poles. The soldiers came to attention.

The *Tuchun* prepared to descend. He pounded a yellow cushion with his pudgy fist and tenderly laid the flute in the hollow thus formed. He swung his feet to the ground. Gems twinkled in his sandals—sapphires and rubies and emeralds.

Mr. Hammerly was making little noises in his throat. The governor of the province had nicely timed this public reception. Ezra was perfectly willing to meet him halfway.

The mandarin stepped out. Mr. Hammerly stepped forward. He took only the one step. He stopped. His extended hand fell at his side. A wave of crimson flooded his square face.

The *Tuchun* hardly glanced at Hammerly. With a toothless, mischievous grin, he folded young Shaw in the flapping arms of his richly embroidered robe.

Sylvia was so entranced by the spectacle that she did not hear her father harshly ordering her to come along. It was like a scene in a play, the yellow hills so unreal across the river, the vermilion and gilt palanquin so wholly Oriental, the picturesque old mandarin and the tall young American embracing like a father and son.

"Sylvia!"

Thrilled and confused and reluctant, Sylvia followed her father. He was white with anger.

"Did you know that fellow was coming here?"

"Yes, dad."

"You two planned it, did you?"

"We didn't plan anything. He just said he would come here."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"What good would it have done?"

Mr. Hammerly asked no more questions. He swung his walking stick viciously at objects beside the road.

They were approaching the caravansary, and the usual delegation of beggars was waiting. They crowded about Mr. Hammerly, holding out their bony hands.

One of them plucked at his sleeve. He was a living skeleton, and almost blind. His hands were palsied.

Mr. Hammerly drew back with repugnance from the beggar.

"Here!" he snapped. "Take this and clear out."

VI

HE disobeyed the urgent advice of his Shanghai friends, and thrust several small coins into the beggar's hands. Plunging his hand into his pocket again, he drew out all the coins he had. He flung these at the beggars.

Promptly a babble arose. The *tai-pan* had weakened! Hereafter those beggars would give him no peace. They crowded about him, clutching at his arms.

No longer were they whining supplicants. They yelled at Mr. Hammerly. They shrieked at him. A hand plucked at his elbow. A waving arm knocked off his hat. And then Ezra Hammerly lost his temper.

Heretofore he had strode through their midst with dignity and outward calm. Now he did the thing that he had been longing to do.

He brought up his walking stick, a stout blackthorn, and he brought it down sharply upon a shaven poll. He brought it down again and again. He lashed about him with the full vigor of unleashed fury.

China had reduced Hammerly to this. It had starved him. It had given him aches in unaccustomed places. It had tormented his pride.

Now Hammerly was getting even. He struck at faces and hands and backs, and every blow he dealt was a blow at China. The babbling became a shrill sustained roar of rage and fury.

"Dad! Stop it!"

"I'll teach them!"

Sylvia was terrified. She had not realized how near the breaking point her father had been.

The beggars were striking back. Some one threw a stone. It struck Hammerly on the small round bald spot at the crown of his head. Blood started to flow at once.

Ugly faces were pressing about Sylvia. The closeness of the repulsive creatures sickened her.

Something—a fist or a stone, perhaps—struck her heavily in the side. Her senses reeled.

Then she was swept from her feet. She was conscious of being borne rapidly along, of being joggled about. She must have fainted.

When Sylvia came to her senses it was

to discover, only a few inches from her own, the dark, anxious face of Wyndham Shaw. She was, it appeared, cradled in his arms.

"You're all right," Shaw said; "you're quite all right."

"Where's dad?"

"I brought him along, too. He's coming around all right."

"Where are we?"

"In the caravansary, under the overhang of the south wall. We'll have to stay here awhile. They're throwing things."

A shower of stones sailed over them as he finished. Sylvia saw that it was necessary for them to huddle against the wall. It was necessary for Shaw to cradle her in his arms. She was afraid that if she stood up she would fall over, anyway. Yes, it was quite all right. She relaxed and sighed.

A pleasant glow was stealing through her. There was a sour, bitter taste in her mouth. She licked her lips. The young man's smile was endearing.

"I gave you some *samshu*; it's a sort of rice whisky," he explained. "It was all I had. Anything with alcohol in it is all right in a case like this. All you need is a kick."

"I am getting a kick," Sylvia assured him.

Another shower of stones came over the wall, and Sylvia buried her face in his chest.

"I don't believe your father appreciated the gravity of the situation," Shaw remarked. "He shouldn't have done that with his cane. You mustn't strike these beggars. It simply isn't done."

"I'm going to get my gun," said a weak, irritable voice somewhere below Sylvia. "I'm going out there—"

"I'm afraid your popularity won't stand the strain, Mr. Hammerly," the young man interposed severely. "You have the whole town against you, you know."

Mr. Hammerly sat up. He looked dully about him.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Well," the blue-eyed young man replied, "the opinion seems to prevail that you've come up here to rob Nan Chang of its only industry—the mines. They don't understand that you only planned to develop the mines. From their point of view your actions have been very suspicious."

"Nonsense!" Ezra snorted.

"You should have gone to the *Tuchun* before you began negotiations with the mine owners," Shaw went on. "The Chinese think the white man has only one purpose in China—to plunder. And this attack on the beggars isn't going to help your cause much. Beggars can cast spells and cause bad luck, you see. They don't want bad joss, so they back up the beggars. I'm sorry you didn't wait and meet his excellency. It wasn't too late then. He could have fixed everything for you. A little squeeze—"

"I won't give anybody any graft!" Mr. Hammerly interrupted.

"You should have stayed and met him, anyhow," the brown-skinned young man declared stubbornly. "He is a charming old fellow. He wanted to chin-chin with you. He thought you were a boy, Sylvia. He thinks bobbed hair is very amusing."

VII

ANOTHER shower of stones came over the wall. Sylvia snuggled closer to Shaw. The sense of his nearness was very soothing. All fear had left her. She was confident that he would somehow find a way out of this predicament.

"You and the *Tuchun* seem to be great friends," Hammerly observed.

Shaw chuckled. "He thinks I have given him the secret of eternal youth. I gave him some pills on my first trip through, four years ago, and he swears by me."

"Pills!" Sylvia echoed.

"Quinine," the young man explained. "He was perishing of malaria."

"You sell them?" Hammerly asked.

"In exceptional cases," Shaw answered. "Three kinds—liver pills, asperin, and pink pills for pale pagans."

"So that's what you're doing in China! Why didn't you tell us before that you were a pill salesman?"

"The time wasn't ripe, and I'm not essentially a pill salesman."

"You think it's ripe now, do you?"

The young man smiled at him. "I suspect that it is."

Mr. Hammerly smoldered.

"Pink pills for pale pagans," he repeated. "What's in them?"

"I never tell," Shaw said with his pleasant smile.

The capitalist snorted: "You mean

perilous pills for pagan peoples, don't you?"

Wyndham Shaw's eyes narrowed. "I wouldn't say that."

Sylvia was mystified. "Wouldn't say what?"

"Opium!"

"Oh!" Sylvia exclaimed. She darted an angry glance at her father. "It seems to me, dad, you're being mighty rude to a man who just saved your life."

"He didn't save my life."

"Oh, yes, I did," the young man retorted. "Five seconds later—and you would have been knifed."

"A pill salesman!" Hammerly snorted again.

"That really isn't the entire picture. The truth is, I'm collecting jade for the Jacksonian Institute. Whenever I can, I take payment in jade. Some day that museum is going to have the finest collection of Ming jade in existence. I suppose you know that Ming jade is far superior to Manchu jade. The Manchus were so ornamental. The simplicity and sincerity of all Chinese carving was lost when the Manchus came in. What I'm really looking for is the jade amulet of the third Buddha that was washed out of a sacred cave in the eleventh century. I must secure that amulet before I leave China. It will complete the collection."

"I don't see," Hammerly interrupted, "what that has to do with our present situation. I hate jade, anyway."

"I adore it," Sylvia asserted.

Her father looked at her. It was borne in upon him that to-day was not only the date of the uprising of the beggars of Nan Chang, but of the rebellion of his hitherto dutiful daughter. There was something ominous in the way she was cradled in the arms of this upstart.

"Let me tell you something, Shaw," Hammerly announced. "I haven't any use for men who use underhand methods."

"You mean, I shouldn't have come to Nan Chang?"

"I mean you saw an opportunity to take an unfair advantage, and you lost no time in taking it."

"But if I hadn't come along, your life and Sylvia's wouldn't be worth a dime, Mr. Hammerly."

"That does not alter the case. I am perfectly willing to reward you for what you have done, and for getting us out of

this predicament, if you can get us out of it. But after we are out of it, that is the end. I hope you understand that, without further discussion."

The young man was thoughtfully silent. It was Sylvia who answered.

"But we're in love, dad," she pointed out.

"Yes," the young man agreed. "How are you going to get around that?"

"It isn't love," Hammerly stated. "You may think it's love, but it isn't love."

"What is it?" Shaw inquired.

"It's nothing but an absurd infatuation. Sylvia is young. She is romantic. You're taking advantage. Do you think it would last a day if we were back in the United States?"

"I can't see what geography has to do with it. I don't see why you're so opposed to me. Why—I'm all right, Mr. Hammerly."

"You're a pill salesman!"

"I'm a jade collector!"

"But you do sell pills!"

"And I do collect jade!"

"I love him," Sylvia remarked with finality.

"You can't have him," her father announced stubbornly.

"Is that final?" the young man asked in a very low voice.

"If you knew me better," Hammerly replied, "you wouldn't waste your breath asking that question. But don't think that I am not grateful for your services. I intend to pay you well. Now give me some idea of how you are planning to get us out of this mess."

"We are going to wait here and see what happens," the young man said, with an air of defeat. "There really isn't any place for us to go, Mr. Hammerly. Some one inside here is going to decide to open that gate at any moment. We are really in a pretty tight corner. We are safe here as long as that gate stays closed; but how long is it going to stay closed? And where can we go?"

"I've got my pistol," the capitalist remarked.

"Don't even show it. A pistol means we intend to kill, and once we start to kill, we're done for. As soon as things quiet down a little, I'll slip out and try to get word through to the *Tuchun*. He may give us protection, and he may not. I must see him on business, anyhow."

"You might be killed!" Sylvia wailed.

"I must go," he said.

The look she gave him made Ezra Hammerly feel positively ill. He was so helpless. Wyndham Shaw was master of the situation.

VIII

PRESENTLY the throwing of sticks and stones came to an end. In the distance a loud crackling began.

"Firecrackers," said Shaw. "The people are beginning to scare out the devils. When the beggars are angry, they turn loose their devils. And to drive the devils away the people will burn incense, set off firecrackers, and bang on their cymbals. That may satisfy them. Let's hope so. They know that you're responsible. You've turned some bad joss loose in Nan Chang, Mr. Hammerly."

"But you will get us out of it," Sylvia said trustfully.

"I'll do my best," he declared. "I'm going to try to get through to the *Tuchun* now. Wait here. Mr. Hammerly, will you bolt the gate after me?"

When Shaw had gone, and the gate was bolted again, Hammerly came over and placed his hands on his daughter's shoulders.

"Sylvia," he said, "you've never turned against me before. I know you think you're in love with this fellow, but you really aren't."

"How do you know?" Sylvia asked.

"Why! You can't be, honey! He's nothing but a pill salesman!"

"He's a jade collector," she corrected him. "And he's the only man I've ever known who really interests me."

"It won't last."

"What if it doesn't? People don't expect love to last forever nowadays. We can only hope for the best."

"You'll feel differently about it when we get back home, dear. Dad is usually right, you know."

"He is shooting at the moon this time," the girl observed.

"Well, you can't have him," her father snapped.

"I'll bet I will," Sylvia retorted.

"I will be glad when we get back to civilization," said Mr. Hammerly, "where we can look at things in their true light."

Sylvia did not reply. Dusk was stealing over Nan Chang, but it was not accom-

panied by the usual stillness. Firecrackers were popping all over the city, and from near and far came the bedlam of clashing cymbals.

Hammerly's discomfort grew as the noise increased. It was he who had started all this commotion. The darkening sky was lurid with the glare of fireworks.

It was all terribly unreal to Ezra. A whole city had gone mad because he struck an insolent beggar! A city filled with demons because he had protected his pride with his walking stick! His daughter gone mad—head over heels in love with a pill salesman!

Hammerly moaned. The bump on his bald spot throbbed pitilessly. He was a little ill from the prodigal dose of restorative that Shaw had administered to him. He looked at Sylvia anxiously.

"It will be wonderful to get back to real food and porcelain bathtubs and civilized clothes again," the father remarked. "I'll bet you'll be glad to get behind the wheel of that new roadster of yours, Syl."

"Just look at that moon," Sylvia suggested.

The moon was a red, fat, smoky, misshapen bulb.

"Damn the moon!" Hammerly exploded.

"I do wish he'd hurry," the girl said. "I'm worried."

He tried to see her face, but it was very indistinct. She was standing erectly beside him.

"Oh, he's all right. He knows his way about in this country."

"You don't care what happens to him," Sylvia accused him. "You—you'd be glad if he was killed. If he comes back I'm never going to let him out of my sight again!"

"You don't intend," her father gasped, "to stay here! You don't think I'd tolerate such nonsense as that, do you?"

"That's for him to decide."

"Sylvia! You *are* mad! Not much! Why—" He stopped. Sylvia was no longer standing beside him. She had moved away. Now she was climbing the crude stone steps to the top of the wall.

"Sylvia! Come back here!"

Sylvia paid no heed to him: She climbed to the top of the broad wall. The moon was higher now. It had lost its yellowness; it was a bright silver disk. It shimmered on the tile roofs.

The hills were a dark, dim tracery on the western horizon. A damp wind, pungent with firecracker smoke, rippled her hair. The moon carved the city into fantastic checks and triangles of ivory and ebony.

Romance rode high on that wind, and danced blithely beneath the moon. All of Sylvia's senses tingled to the call of unseemly adventure. Somewhere in that darkness, Wyndham Shaw was risking himself for her.

"One of these days I hope to find that jade amulet of the third Buddha," he had said.

"So do I," Sylvia sighed now.

Lanterns, many lanterns, were coming down the street toward the caravansary. She strained her eyes against the thin smoke haze. In the gleam of a lantern she caught the glisten of rippling gold. It was the palanquin of the *Tuchun*!

She scrambled down the steps as a hammering began on the gate. Dark figures swarmed in the compound. The gate was opened. Rifles glistened in the lantern light.

"Sylvia!"

Her heart seemed to leap into her throat. She sped across the compound to Shaw. He placed an arm about her. It seemed natural for him to do that.

IX

THE *Tuchun* was relaxed upon his cushions. At a word from him, a coolie held a lantern to Sylvia's face. The *Tuchun* spoke lengthily to Wyndham Shaw, and she felt the young man's body grow tense. He answered briefly.

Hammerly was hovering near by, a lantern likewise held to his face.

"His excellency says," Shaw presently translated, "that it would be a waste of time, Mr. Hammerly, for you to continue negotiations with the mining men for the present. And he thinks that you would be unwise in staying in Nan Chang. He suggests that you return later, after this trouble has blown over. Your life is in real danger now. This devil chasing with fireworks and cymbals will continue all night, and they may turn on you before morning. We can't guess what they will do."

The conference continued in Chinese. The *Tuchun* spoke lengthily, Shaw in short syllables. Presently the young man addressed Hammerly again:

"It's a ticklish situation, Mr. Hammer-

ly. The *Tuchun* wants you to leave as soon as you can pack your things. He will give you an armed escort to Ichang, where you will take steamer or junk for Hankow or Shanghai or wherever you please."

"Thank him most heartily for us!" Hammerly cried.

The young man looked at him darkly for a few moments.

"You are to go alone," he said. "The *Tuchun* wants your daughter to remain."

Ezra Hammerly took a step toward the palanquin and staggered.

"Tell him," he shrieked, "that he can go to hell!"

"He would have your head off if I told him that," Shaw explained.

Hammerly was trembling as if with an ague.

"I've heard of this sort of thing," he panted. "He wants my daughter, does he, the yellow hog? You tell him—"

"I'm afraid I didn't go quite far enough, Mr. Hammerly," the young man interrupted calmly. "He has been quoting Lai Tai Pe—one of the old Chinese poets. What he says, in substance, is that it is a boundless joy when souls that are meant for each other meet and are joined, but a devastating sorrow when they are not. He realizes how much Sylvia and I love each other. He is very fond of me. He wants me to be happy."

"It's a frame up!" Hammerly snarled. "You cooked that up between you—you dope peddler!"

"I'll thank you to retract that," the young man said stiffly. "I am not a dope peddler."

"Perilous pills for pagan peoples!" Mr. Hammerly cried. "Opium!"

"I have never sold a gram of opium in any form," Shaw declared earnestly. "Here are my pills. They are absolutely harmless."

He opened a knapsack that was slung from one shoulder, and produced a handful of round pink pills. They glowed like pearls in the lantern light.

"The Chinese demand these things because their color is so lovely, and because they think they will cure anything. As you say, I'm only a pill salesman, anyway. I supply what there's a demand for. Is it my fault that there are yellow hypochondriacs as well as white ones?"

"Sylvia," her father said, "don't let him

fool you. You're being tricked. There's enough opium in every one of those pills to kill a man who isn't used to the stuff. Come over here with me!"

"I believe him," Sylvia announced.

"I tell you, he's peddling dope!"

Sylvia's answer was dramatic. She scooped the dozen pills from Shaw's cupped hand. She placed them in her mouth and swallowed them.

The young man smiled.

"Just so much candy," he said.

The *Tuchun* fired a question at him.

"He wants to know," Shaw translated, "when you are going to start packing. He advises you not to delay. If these people decide suddenly to take your life, no one can stop them."

Mr. Hammerly turned to his daughter: "Sylvia, you talk to him. You can persuade him."

"I don't want to persuade him. I want to stay."

"You don't mean that, Sylvia." Hammerly stopped, trying to find the right words to use. "You've just been carried away by all this, Sylvia. You'll be sick when you come to your senses. This man is nothing but an adventurer."

"I love him," Sylvia said.

Mr. Hammerly mopped his forehead. In his lexicon there was no such word as fail.

"Look here, Shaw, I'll make an agreement with you," he announced. "You persuade this Chinaman to let Sylvia go. You can do it. Then you come down to Shanghai and we'll talk it over. Sylvia isn't responsible for what she's doing now. I'm not thinking of myself, I'm only trying to guard her from a mistake."

"Let's all go down to Shanghai," he urged, when he saw that the young man was not weakening. "Let's face this thing honestly and honorably. Let's not go off halfcocked. That's all I ask. If you decide then that you want each other, you can have each other."

"I don't want to go," Sylvia objected. "I won't have things spoiled by a lot of parleying. I know you too well, dad. Once you get started, you could convince a polar bear at the north pole that he didn't need his fur overcoat."

"But you can't stay here like this—alone—"

"There's a missionary in Chung-kiang, two days through the hills from here by mule," Shaw suggested. "He'll marry us."

"I won't permit it!"

"I think it's a sound idea," the girl asserted.

X

HAMMERLY clasped and unclasped his hands. Everywhere he turned he saw enemies. The *Tuchun* was watching his antics with lively curiosity.

Ezra Hammerly had never surrendered in all his life. He would not surrender now.

"See here," he panted, "you aren't going to drag my daughter up and down China, selling pink pills!"

The lovers stared at him. Neither spoke. His resemblance to a caged animal seeking a way to escape became more marked.

Every one was staring at him as if he were a curiosity, even his own daughter. His head was literally bloody, but unbowed. He would not surrender. Never!

"Sylvia!" he cried. "You can't stand this kind of life. It'll ruin your complexion. It will grind the youth out of you. You'll die of the hardships. I've got a suggestion to make. Come back to the United States with me. You can be married by that missionary in Chung-kiang if you want to. Both of you come back with me. I'll give you a job, Shaw—a fine job. You can write your own ticket. I need a nerry, fearless fellow like you!"

"Well," the young man remarked, "what do you think, Sylvia?"

"I think it's a pretty sound idea," she replied.

"You'll go?" Ezra Hammerly begged.

"We'll go," Wyndham Shaw answered.

Mr. Hammerly did not pursue the subject further. He had been thoroughly whipped, thoroughly put in his place, by this audacious young man. He wiped the beads of battle from his brow, and in so doing missed a significant glance from the eyes of the *Tuchun*, a glance directed at Shaw, and to which the jade collector responded with a slight nod.

It was as if the Chinese governor had asked in so many words: "Is everything arranged to your liking, my young friend?" And the young man had, by nodding, replied that everything was. Thus Hammerly was spared the suffering that would have resulted had he been made aware that he had been ground between the upper and nether millstones—and ground exceeding small!

The *Tuchun* now shot a long peroration at Shaw.

"His excellency wishes you to know that when we start for Ichang, via Chung-kiang," the young man translated to Hammerly, "he will provide us with chairs, fifty chair coolies, and a staff of servants. He is providing, aside from these, a special guard of twenty-five riflemen who will be strictly a guard of honor for you. He seems to have taken a sudden fancy to you, Mr. Hammerly. He wants you to accept a little souvenir of your visit to Nan Chang, and any time you wish to return to reopen negotiations with the mining men, he assures you of the warmest of welcomes."

The *Tuchun* was removing something from his neck. It was a fine gold chain. At the end of it dangled a small dark object. Ezra Hammerly carelessly accepted it from the pudgy yellow fingers.

"It is a symbol of brotherly love," Shaw explained. "It is yellow jade, Mr. Hammerly—if you strike it with your finger nail it will give off a sweet ringing note, which is supposed to resemble the voice of love. The Chinese, you know, believe that jade is the concentrated essence of love. It is *Yu-chi*—the quintessence of heaven and earth."

"Jade!" Mr. Hammerly remarked, in a pained voice; but he accepted the trifle and suspended it inside his shirt as Shaw suggested that he do.

Sylvia seized the opportunity to ask Wyndham Shaw a question or two a little later, as their chairs, side by side, swung through the night.

"You never intend to return to China," Sylvia said, putting her observation in the form of a statement rather than a question.

"My work in China is done," was the young man's reply.

"I am curious," Sylvia confessed, "to know just why my father is being honored with a special escort of twenty-five riflemen, and why you have so suddenly lost interest in finding the jade amulet of the third Buddha."

Wyndham Shaw was silent. But he reached across the space that separated their chairs and took possession, in the darkness, of her hand.

"There must never be any secrets between us," he observed, presently.

"Never!" Sylvia declared.

"The fact of the whole sordid matter," Shaw explained, "is that to smuggle the amulet of the third Buddha out of China is a very ticklish undertaking."

"Provided it is found," Sylvia remarked. "You must first catch your amulet."

"Provided it is found," he agreed. "It is a religious relic. If it were known to be in my possession, I might be highly embarrassed. Yet it is absolutely essential to complete the Jacksonian Institute's jade collection. Let us suppose that I had found it and purchased it from its owner at an exorbitant price. Considering all

the circumstances, what would you have done, Sylvia?"

"Well," the girl replied sweetly, "I think I'd conspire to have it presented to some eminently respectable American business man traveling in China, and then I should arrange to give this American an escort of twenty-five riflemen to the coast. Then, when I was safely on board an American ship, I think I would simply take the amulet away from him!"

In the darkness, Wyndham Shaw tenderly and respectfully kissed the hand of Sylvia Hammerly.

Home Again

THIS GIRL WENT FAR AWAY IN AN ATTEMPT TO PROVE TO
HERSELF THAT HAPPINESS IS A MYTH

By Katharine Haviland Taylor

WHEN Jim Trent first saw Virginia Vaughan, he said: "Who is that girl?"

It sometimes happens this way—and the man of whom he had asked the question drawled out his answer, and stared around Cecile MacManus's well filled rooms as he spoke.

"Southern girl," he stated, "called Vaughan, I think. Draws—or tries to. Rather ghastly work, Cecile says—clutters with lines. Has no sense of arrangement." And he waved his hands, frowning.

Jim, who had been looking steadily at Virginia since his first glimpse of her, said, simply: "I want to meet her—"

"Easy enough," his friend agreed. "We'll find Cecile."

Thereupon they found Cecile, curled up in a very modern fashion on a broad box couch. A young violinist whom the world loves sat by her, stroking her hand with his sensitive, marvelous fingers.

Cecile, who was enjoying the moment, ordered them off. "Nobody gets met in my house," she explained irritably. "Go talk to her. She won't care, and anyway, can't you see I'm busy? You're so stodgy!"

They could see that she was busy, and they left her, and Jimmy Trent, after straightening his crisp, smart tie, edged toward the Southern girl who for the moment was alone. Jim suffered a flash of uncertainty which turned him awkward.

He knew studio affairs and the conduct possible while enjoying them, but this girl looked as if she would prefer an introduction. He hesitated, saw a youth bearing down who he feared sought the same goal, cleared his throat, and plunged recklessly.

"Miss Vaughan," he said, "may I present myself? I tried to get Cecile to sponsor me, but she's busy with Vladimir—you see my intentions were most honorable!"

She smiled at him, and his heart quickened in its beat.

"What's your name?" she asked simply. He told her; his voice not quite his own.

"What do you do?" she inquired next. He told her that, smiling. "I really am an outlander," he confessed. "I'm in the exchange—"

She laughed delightedly. "If you knew the relief!" she said gayly. "I'm so wea-

ried of having people read aloud their work to me! And you won't, will you?"

"Not unless there is a ticker somewhere in the offing," he assured her. Again she laughed.

"Would you like to talk with me?" she questioned. He said with a little smile that she did not understand at all—he would like it better than anything else in the world.

She labeled him as an extravagant verbal flirt in her busy small head, and led him across the room to a bench that had once stood in the kitchen of a quiet farmhouse in Devonshire. Here, settled, she faced him, and he studied a girl of a lovely oval face and burnished copper hair—light flying tresses—and large, deep, gray eyes of melancholy slant, and heavy, shading lashes.

Sweet lips, he saw, and through them forgot the rest of her. He brought himself back to every day with a sharp jerk. He was quite mad, he decided. This sort of thing did not happen to sane young men who played with tickers.

To Vladimir and his sort, perhaps, it happened, but to Jimmy's sort—no! Yet here he was—in spite of all denial—waiting breathlessly for her words; unsteady from her nearness.

"Why are you here?" he asked after she had told him that she did "quite the most abominable work—"

She answered simply: at eighteen her mother had died, and when she was nineteen her father had remarried, and she did not like the new arrangement.

"And why," she ended, "stick to anything you do not like?"

"Why?" he echoed, a light of amusement in his eyes.

"There's no point to-day," she stated. "Everything young and everything here teaches one to look out for oneself."

He frowned. "I know," he admitted slowly, "but I have a curious feeling that happiness must be grounded—"

She did not understand grounded; he must explain.

"Two poles—" she said, nodding, after his oral diagram. "I see; and you think happiness is a reflection?"

He nodded. "Of some one's else joy," he declared. She smiled and he colored.

"Is it a new cult?" she asked. He shook his head before he answered: "A very old one."

"Well," she said slowly, leaning forward, clasping her hands between her knees, palms together, elfin in her pinched up attitude; "well, it sounds dangerously close to Pollyannaism, to me. I don't believe you! My own mother was very devoted to my father; she made him very happy, I think, but I can't see that that made her happy. And, anyway, it's an old manner of seeing it. To-day one finds oneself through tubes of paint, or whatever your working fingers need—and freedom."

He scoffed at her, sitting back and looking immensely male and attractive as he shot his bantering questions.

"Freedom!" he echoed, laughing. "Dear child, there isn't any freedom in this life. So long as man breathes he's dependent upon something if no more than air."

They argued about it long and heatedly.

"Look here," he said, when they found the room was nearly empty, and that the outside world had turned to a thick gray, "let's go down to the Lafayette for dinner—won't you? We're fighting rippingly, and, gosh, I hate to stop!"

She said—stepping back to an old Southern garden: "But I hardly know you!"

He retorted, a hand on her arm, and propelling her toward the door: "Freedom, individuality, lack of restraint!"

She called him horrid, but she really thought him quite too wonderful. She secretly hoped that he liked her. In the taxi, looking up at him through a fringe of heavy lashes, she found him looking down at her, and she knew he liked her. It sometimes happens this way.

II

THEY lingered absurdly over their dinner. The waiter called them *madame* and *monsieur*. At first it was a delightful joke.

Suddenly Jimmy Trent plunged. "How the devil can he say that," he questioned, "when he sees how much I am in love with you?"

She tried to laugh at him, and failed. He reached across the table to gather her small hand up in the tight, hurting squeeze of his big hand.

"Do you feel it?" he asked thickly. She looked away and then back at him; she nodded and tried to smile. He saw that her lips trembled.

"I love you—" he whispered, leaning toward her, across the little table.

She shook her head, and looked away. "Not—*now!*" she ordered. Her words gave him hope—the look in her eyes left him reeling—but, being strong, he pulled himself together to plan, with creditably steady voice, where they would go on the following evening.

There ensued a week of this pattern; theaters, dinners, parties together. Once there was a luncheon that took the day from its normal state and made a casserole part of a breath-stopping, aching ecstasy.

"I'm gone!" Jimmy exclaimed. "Dead gone, Virginia!" "Dear!" she replied. She stretched her little hand toward him across a table. He took it, languidly; so much stress had left him mentally inert. But at her touch he was strong; his hand gripped hers until she winced.

Then one night—at the end of that breathless week—there was a drive in a mist that turned street lamps to balls of yellow chiffon—and a skid. After the jolt, Virginia found herself gathered up in Jimmy's arms, and they both knew that they couldn't "go on much longer this way!"

"I must have you!" he whispered. "I can't live without you!"

That is the ancient lie that is for the moment a truth. But she heard it and believed it.

And in turn she told her lie: "I'll do everything I can to make you happy. I'll give you everything—everything—you want!"

Her voice broke; then she was crying against his crisply tied cravat that made taffeta-scratchy noises under the touch of her soft hair.

"Darling! Beautiful! Adorable!" she heard. The pressure of his arms—oh, how had she lived before without it? How had she lived? "Don't ever let's be parted," she whimpered.

"Parted?" he echoed. He laughed at the idea; his merriment brimming to the edges of his cup of joy, and threatening to overflow. "Parted!" he said again.

The extravagant, impossible idea! He stooped, turned her face upward to his, and found her lips. Then they heard in their souls the hush of death and the surge of life and the hint of their world to be.

III

THEY were married quickly, but not so soon as to be without time for a good deal of extravagant protestation. She reëchoed

her ideas of individuality; he listened and nodded. With her, in the box of a room she called her studio, he hardly knew what he heard, nor to what he agreed.

"Are you listening, Jimmy?" she questioned, at the end of one feverish, reeling, beautiful, torturing afternoon. She sat on a high, wide window sill. He, standing by her, arms around her, answered with a voice muffled, his face against her hair.

"I think—I am," he said.

"I'm wild about you, Jimmy. I'll always want to be with you. But if I don't, I'll skip."

"Don't, dear!"

"It's merely hypothetical. There's no point in sticking to anything you don't like, to-day, is there?"

"Probably not, dear," he replied. He brushed her cheek with his cheek, and tightened his arms a little.

"I lit out from home, Jimmy, simply because it pinched a little. Not much, you understand, but a little. Why stand anything that doesn't perfectly agree, with one?"

He raised his head, and she saw that his eyes were dazed. "Dear," he asked, "what are you talking about? And how can you be interested in anything—except to-morrow?"

From her dormer window sill perch she looked around the room on the slanting roof. Here she had planned to go on, to study in Paris or Italy—and then Jim had come to upset her plans.

Here she had dreamed triumphs, and then Jim had come with a supply of new dreams. Nature—and Jim—had made her traitor to the chart she had made for her life.

"Oh, we'll be so happy!" she whispered.

IV

THEY were happy, very happy, for a little time. She, an adorable small thing, was generous with her love for him, and unashamed of it. And he, utterly swayed by her, was courtly, tender, and strong.

But there are levels, and they came. Married life bored her—*bored* her!

Getting up in the morning to a hurried breakfast, the last one exactly like the first, and all that lay between. His paper, his apologetic reading of it, his throwing over to her of a stray word bone or two—

"What are you planning to do to-day?" His eyes were still on print; perhaps his

speech was a little thickened by a bit of toast. So much hurry in the mornings!

Then—breakfast down—he would hurry toward the small hall, and there make an arc swoop of his arms that took them into his coat while she stood to the side, holding his hat.

"Rather Victorian!" she remarked one morning, almost bitterly.

He was too hurried to pay heed to her tone. "Take care of your little self!" he called, after a quick, emotionless kiss.

He said "Take care of your little self" each morning.

Then the day began of planning the dinner first, which the cook always planned again with an eye to the ice box and the season. After that, out to walk or shop, or to have luncheon with one of her friends, and a *matinée*, or a tea, and home.

It was a silly life. It made a great discontent for her. She decided she would work, but somehow work didn't go well.

One late winter afternoon, when the dusk had fallen, she stood away from her easel whereon was the worst work she had ever done, and said tragically to herself: "*Marriage has ruined me!*"

Then she thought of the days, and of what was in them, and she decided it was time to skip! It made her feel a little cold to realize it. Jim cared so awfully! But she decided coolly that she didn't like it. She cleaned her palette as she thought: "Marriage isn't at all as I thought it would be."

She reckoned up her income as she cleaned her brushes, an income left to her by a mother who had been quite the old sort—submerged. It was enough, Virginia realized, to live quite decently, anywhere.

As she decided this, the front door opened as only Jimmy opened it. It burst open and shut with a bang.

Then she heard: "Hello! Where's my girl!" He had a booming voice even when it was a bit slowed and roughened by weariness.

She knew that when she joined him he would swing her off her feet, hold her high against him, rub her cheek with his cold cheek, kiss her, set her down and laugh from no more reason than sheer joy of living and loving—and coming home to her.

But he was strong; he would weather a little bump, she decided. Great heavens, she had been acting, thinking, as if marriages were the indissoluble ball and chain

they had been years gone by in the dark ages.

"Ginie!" he called again.

"Here!" she answered.

He came to the door of the room she had chosen for work, to stand in it grinning.

"How goes it?" he asked, his happy eyes tender because they rested on her.

"Quite rotten," she replied.

"Aren't you going to kiss me?"

"I'm all over paint—"

He crossed the room to stand beside her. Towering above her, he looked down on her quizzically. A slight frown lowered his thick eyebrows and made them an accent between his questioning eyes.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Fed up," she answered, "with you, marriage, everything."

She raised her face to meet his—and wished she had not. It was unfair of him to look so stricken, she decided petulantly. His pallor, the strained set of his lips, and the stiffening of his cheeks—all made him look so different!

"I've got to be *free!*" she sung out stridently.

She waited for him to speak, but he said nothing.

"You wouldn't want to hold me?" she demanded.

He shook his head vigorously.

"A trial apart," she explained.

He said: "Do you realize that if you do come back—you will never be the same to me?"

"Why not?"

"Because you left me—when I needed you?"

"But if I'm bored and have no life here?"

"Of course, then—you might as well go. It's a confession of your lack of feeling for me. 'Bored!' 'No life!'"

He laughed mirthlessly, and her discomfort increased from the fact that she saw tears standing in his eyes.

V

SHE left him with the repeated assurance that it was a "trial." He made no answer.

He did not say much more than good morning and good night, these days, and she wondered how his repression could depress her so. Surely she had been tried often enough by his light-hearted repeti-

tions, his bromides that were an evidence of his good spirits?

She tried to make conversation. He responded so stolidly that she could not go on.

"Where are you going?" he asked heavily one morning.

"Florence, Italy," she answered, and the answer made a leap of heart for her. So had her heart leaped when she had answered her father's similar question by "New York." She saw now through Florence the answer to every need, as she had seen it once when younger, through New York, which had been so disappointing.

"I'll hear from you?" he asked.

"Of course. This is not a separation, Jimmy!"

"Isn't it? It looks it—and feels it to me," he murmured. He looked at her a moment, the ache that was in him showing in his eyes. Then he gazed down again at his plate and resumed his stolid eating.

VI

IN spite of all its loveliness, Florence was curiously disappointing to Virginia Trent in many ways. In the first place, and let those who will prate of the warmth of Italy, Florence in winter months is cold.

Virginia settled herself on the Via Nazionale, which is a mean and narrow way before it fronts the park. Here she found a barn of a frescoed room, with a balky, bulging iron stove that was in all its power too frail to heat more than a quarter of the place.

After a bath in a tin tub that never looked or felt quite clean, Virginia would dress and try to drink the chicory-flavored coffee that was brought to her by smiling Marietta, who, despite the thickest fog, said always: "Pretty day!"

Then Virginia would work, but the room was cold, and the cold stiffened her hands. Then came luncheon, with the cheese floating in the soup, the meat rolled in cabbage leaves, the *pasta*, the *conservé*.

On other than class afternoons she took walks in the old loveliness of the city—but they were lonely walks.

The fellow students were a disconcerting set, frank idlers who had come over on the pretense of study, or hard-jawed, masculine girls and effeminate men who saw nothing but color and form and line.

Once and again, but rarely, there was a soul who promised real genius, but this

soul was walking alone and seeming to the onlooker so lonely.

A month of it, with exposure and the wrong food, brought Virginia a cold, a rather racking sort, which left her feeling badly and wanting her *home*.

She thought of the breakfast table, of Jim sitting opposite her, so solidly, reading his paper. She visualized his rush to the hall, windmilling his arms into his coat, saying: "Take care of your little self!" and rushing off. She could hear his heavy, quick tread as he made off toward the elevator.

And, if now at home, she would telephone to a girl friend, and go shopping, and then somewhere to luncheon. It was all so comfortable. Why had she ever thought herself to be destined for a career?

Yet a career could be satisfying, she decided. She thought of Ethel Benson, this English woman who was doing such wonderful work in Florence. Surely, a genius must be very happy.

Oddly enough, that afternoon Virginia encountered her at Donni's, and when she was presented to the English woman, she felt herself to be studied rather closely.

"Sit down, child," the older woman said. "American I can see by your clothes and your style. Here alone?"

Virginia answered somewhat at length. She confessed her doubts and her periods of loneliness. Her depression, she said, with a childish plaintiveness, came from the fogs.

"But there must be utter satisfaction from real work, well done," Virginia remarked.

Ethel Benson said a flat: "There is." And then she laughed rather heavily.

"But satisfaction is a lonely animal," she went on. "You see me now, a big horse of an English woman who is rewarding herself for a long day's work by a tray of French pastries. Didn't you love your husband?"

Virginia nodded—and, to her utter horror, she felt her eyes sting.

The English woman studied her yet more sharply, but with a kind amusement. "Not grown up, eh?" she questioned. She sat back from the table, although her tray of French pastries was not yet empty.

"Child," she said, "do you remember how your mother's eyes grew starry when she looked at you? Lord, child—why do you choose this Florence thing? Don't

ever be like me unless you have to—a long day's work and French pastries; or a part of a big party where people flatter you. But never to have the feeling of mattering more than breath itself to any one soul! Never the knowledge of being a woman, and having a man's heart in your keeping! Go home—"

VII

SHE reached home three weeks later. She found her apartment rented to some one else, and her furniture, she learned from the janitor, had been sold.

"He had to sell after his failure," the words echoed.

His failure! How would Jimmy act as a failure?

She found him—tracked through the help of a friend—in a second rate rooming house later that same day.

He opened his door to see her sitting on his bed. She had expected from him a cry, an ardent welcome. He asked, without taking his hand from the knob:

"Well?"

"Home," she replied.

"The home is gone."

"We'll make another."

"For you to leave?"

"No."

She got up and went to stand close to him. He said: "What's the use? There's nothing left now. I've lost my faith, my nerve, my money."

"You haven't lost my love for you," she pointed out. He tried to withstand her, and failed.

She felt his arms, resenting their weakness, close around her, and then grow strong from his need for her. She heard his sob, and answered it.

"If you ever do it again," he whispered, "it will do me up forever."

She answered in a way that he did not understand at the moment.

"I'm going after an anchor," she said, her voice close to a song. "I know where to find happiness. Ethel Benson told me in Florence. Do you remember how your mother looked at you—the happiness and peace in her eyes? I never could draw anyway, Jim, and Italy was another failure. But there I found that I want what I scorned. And if you'll let me try, I'll be a real wife. You'll let me try, Jim?"

He nodded, strength again in the lift of his head.

PEARLS FOR TEARS

You came when all the world dripped tears
And laughed at my sad face;
I made an image of you then
And put it in high place:

Bright silver for your hair, my lad,
Bright sapphires for your eyes;
Young moonbeams for your shoon, my lad,
Your roving place the skies.

Intangible, elusive as
A green, sardonic Puck,
You hid your hands—then showed to me
A fluffy yellow duck.

So, though I threw my lyre away
I'll borrow some one's lute.
Now off to England let us go
And thus escape pursuit.

We'll laze around the world all day
And watch the sun ride high;
We'll play Doll's House beside the sea
Till love has passed us by.

Away to France forthwith I'll sail,
My proud, gay head held high;
Rejoicing now that I have quite
Forgotten how to cry!

Rene Guion

The Lovely Lady

THE STRANGE EXPERIENCES INTO WHICH OFFICER O'RAFFERTY
WAS LED BY HIS LIFELONG DEVOTION TO A BEAUTIFUL
CHARMER WHO WAS NOT MRS. O'RAFFERTY

By George Sterling

POLICEMAN O'RAFFERTY — this was years and years ago—stood before the large plate glass window of Ransom, Ransom & Co., and gazed long and lovingly within.

"The lovely lady!" he murmured adoringly.

No—his eyes were fixed on no shapely stenographer. No comely bookkeeper or cashier had evoked that worshipful purring. It was well after midnight, and the long, narrow office of the great firm of importers was empty, its only sound the whistling of the twenty gas jets that kept it so well lighted—gas jets, not electric lights, for Ransom, Ransom & Co., for all their high financial standing, were an old-fashioned firm. They might as well have been English.

"The lovely lady!" again soliloquized Officer O'Rafferty.

Following his gaze, we accept the sudden revelation of the cause of such unqualified homage. Without doubt he is looking at the painted figure, be it woman or goddess, that adorns the tall doors of the vault of Ransom, Ransom & Co.

The long room ended—it still ends—in that steel treasury. The doors of the vault rise almost to the none-too-high ceiling, and are black and ponderous. When open and swung back, they inflict catastrophe on the fair one, for she is cut fairly in two—a tragedy somewhat mitigated by the fact that she is then invisible to the eyes of the daylight horde.

Night, however, makes reparation, and she passes the long hours un mutilated, her round right arm ever stretched toward the

cluster of pink roses a foot beyond her grasp. She lies on her back, a good eight feet from the floor, and is none too prudishly arrayed. In fact, tradition has it that old Mr. Ransom's insistence on her seminudity was the cause of his losing two of his oldest and most respectable customers.

Officer O'Rafferty, however, had no such queasiness. He gazed long and rapturously, though the nude had but small appeal to him, nor could he himself have told the reason for his fascination. Only one person could have explained it, and she was dead. His mother, could she have taken a peek at the lady of ungrasped roses, might have exclaimed:

"Why, she's the livin' image of Nora McNally!"

But Officer O'Rafferty had not consciously noted the likeness. Nora McNally was five years dead, and he stared no longer into the faces of living women.

Once more let us bear witness to the strange infatuation of the big policeman. Once more let us hear him murmur: "The lovely lady!" and see him pass on about his perilous business.

Still must you be requested to hold the past for your background, since it is only a month later. Officer O'Rafferty stands before the desk of his captain and receives certain orders.

"An' ye're to have the Pierce-Hill-Mason beat after this next Sunday," concludes the captain.

Officer O'Rafferty stares at him in silence. Rebellion is surging in him, but for

EDITORIAL NOTE—This clever story was quite, or nearly, the last written by its talented author, whose tragic death occurred on November 17, 1926. The editors of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE wish to pay their tribute of respect and admiration to Mr. Sterling's memory.

what reason he could not at the moment tell you. He continues to stare, his face slowly reddening.

"An' what now?" demands the captain, glancing at him with irritated curiosity; for O'Rafferty had hitherto been a docile fellow.

His subordinate endeavors to speak, achieving only a wordless mumble, even if not a meaningless one.

"What now?" I said," snaps the gray-haired captain.

"Sure, sure! Ah, now, captain, I want to kape me old bate."

"Ye fool! Ye'll take what's handed ye, an' no questions asked. My God, an' that the better beat! What ails ye, man?"

"I want me old bate. I won't take no other bate."

"Ye'll take what's handed ye, or ye'll take the air!"

"Thin I'll take the air!"

II

TIME, twenty years later, which is not so far from our own dear age of jazz. Behold, not Officer O'Rafferty, but O'Rafferty the night watchman. It is one o'clock of a vicious February night, and O'Rafferty is up to his old nonsense. On his chapped lips are the words of that same litany without a response. He is once more muttering:

"The lovely lady!"

When he left the force, he had found employment as a night watchman. There was a living in it—not much over, more's the pity, for he had gone the way of all flesh and taken unto himself a wife, who in turn had taken unto herself offspring—three boys and a girl, to be needlessly exact. At that, things would not have been so bad had O'Rafferty had enough sense to mate with one of his own kind; but fate had urged him into the arms of a girl who, fresh from an up-State farm, yearned more and more each year for country air and rural scenes.

"An' who am I to be buyin' a farm? 'Tis lucky we are to be havin' the rint ready on the firrst—an' not always thin."

It must be O'Rafferty speaking, for Mrs. O'Rafferty is of Scandinavian ancestry.

Yes, he had his old beat, or near enough to it—and his old infatuation. Yet why use so harsh a term for what is delight to the eyes and warmth to the heart? Have not wise men told us that one illusion is

as good as another? O'Rafferty could not return too quickly to the dear and still unidentified vision of her who was the recurrent reward of his long hours, often cold and sometimes much too hot; lonely as well, and on occasion not without their hazards.

True it is that he made his rounds all the more rapidly in order to have time for gazing on her unchanging loveliness. It perhaps made him the better night watchman, that hurried circuit.

To him she was indeed unchanged. A captious critic—and what critics are not captious?—might have detected a dimming of those gracious hues of cincture and flesh and roses; but not so the night watchman, whose heart, which had truly loved, never forgot. The O'Raffertys had ever been true to their women—not that this one ever mentioned the lovely lady to Ellen, his wife. Since he understood not, how should Ellen?

He gave once more his *cri du cœur*, and passed by on his proper occasions.

It was a month later, with milder weather, but with ice sometimes forming at the corners of wind-swept streets. One unfortunate seemed to have been abroad at an ill hour. Preceding O'Rafferty up the block, he was seen to slip suddenly and seat himself ungracefully on the gelid sidewalk. The night watchman hastened to his aid, and with considerable effort lifted him to a standing posture.

"An' are ye all right now?" O'Rafferty kindly demanded. "Sure, there's a lot of the domned ice still left here and there. A man has to watch his step."

The man tried his foot, and emitted sounds of distress.

"She's sprained—sprained bad," he lamented. "I've done it twice before this. That ankle ain't strong."

"An' can't ye walk at all, at all?"

"No. There's only one thing to be done. Have you—where's—"

"I'll ring for an ambulance, sure."

"Hell, no! What do I want of an ambulance? Where's the nearest drug store?"

"Drug store, is it? Sure, the nearest wan is a good nine blocks off. This is a business district, ye must be mindin'."

"I've got to have some adhesive tape," the stranger half moaned.

Gazing into his face in the light of the near-by electric, O'Rafferty was surprised

that a man with so strong and even brutal a face should be showing such weakness.

"Is it broke it is?" he queried.

"No, only sprained; but I sprain bad. I'd be all right, though, if I had some adhesive tape." He reached into a pocket, brought forth a roll of bills, peeled off one, and proffered it to O'Rafferty. "There's ten bucks," he said. "Go and get me that tape, and you can keep the change. It won't be over a dollar for the tape—that leaves you nine."

"Sure, I shouldn't be off me bate."

"But you're not a regular bull. It won't take you long; an' nine bucks! They don't grow on every bush."

O'Rafferty grew pensive. True, it wouldn't take so very long; and it was an errand of mercy—almost an imperative one, in such cold. Moreover, all three O'Rafferty boys needed shoes.

"I'll take a chance," he declared.

III

THE drug store was closed, for it was no longer Saturday night, but Sunday morning. O'Rafferty was some time in arousing the clerk, and the clerk was in no extreme haste to supply his wants; so it was a full half hour before he got back to the scene of the accident. When he finally arrived there, no stranger was in sight.

"Well, well!" he soliloquized. "I suppose a taxi came along. A rich bird he must be, to be flingin' tin-dollar bills around and nothin' to show for them! 'Adhasive tape,' is it, an' we not usin' an inch of it in a lifetime! I wish I had the dollar back!"

For some time the night watchman pondered the affluent stranger's disappearance.

"He didn't look like a rich wan, but ye can't tell a chicken by its feathers. 'Tis sure he was in tirrible pain."

So muttering, O'Rafferty was aware of brisk footsteps at his heels and a familiar voice in his ears.

"Well, see who's here!" it proclaimed. "If it isn't dad!"

He paused, turning to find Officer Rathbone, whose beat overlapped his own. A sharp young man of the new school of policemen was Rathbone, with a ready sneer for elder days and methods, yet there was only sincere kindness in his voice as he greeted O'Rafferty—kindness tempered, perhaps, by a mild curiosity and milder amusement.

"'Tis a dad I am, which is more than ye can be bragging of," the night watchman replied, and went on to describe the accident he had lately witnessed. "It was from that domned hydrant lakin'," he concluded, with a poke of his thumb at the guilty object.

"But ten dollars!" exclaimed Rathbone, glancing around at the dark buildings that rose about them.

"Sure, he was in tirrible pain. Did ye niver sprain yer ankle?" replied O'Rafferty.

"Ten dollars! What did he look like?"

The two men resumed their beat, the older one describing the stranger as best he could.

"He had a bad eye an' big fate," he concluded.

"Can't place him," commented Rathbone, glancing up at the tallest building.

"Dare say he was all right."

"I've come on quarer things than that."

"We all have. What's your graft, anyhow, dad?"

"Graft, is it? Sure, all ye on the foorce should have nothin' to larn about graft, indade an' indade!"

Rathbone laughed.

"Well, then," he went on, "what's the big secret, if you want it put that way? Why did you jump your job to be a mere night watchman down in this dump, with not a day off from year's end to year's end? By now you could be retired on a pension and at your ease."

O'Rafferty knew that his mysterious action had gone into police legends, the more memorably because so inexplicable. A hundred times had he been pumped on the subject, and now, as always, he merely wagged his head sagely, like one who could say much were it not for superior discretion.

"Go on!" urged the younger man. "Come clean, dad! What was the graft? Is it still coming through?"

"An' the likes o' ye askin' me about anny graft!"

"Well, dad, it must have been something to make you give up a good place when they were trying to promote you. I have it now! *Who was she*, dad?"

Rathbone was still glancing about him at the tall office buildings, or he might have noted the flush that came to his elder's face; but who was he, to be admitted to a privacy so sentimental yet so profound? O'Rafferty lied stoutly.

"There was no she," he answered. "Ain't I a married man?"

"You weren't then."

"Ellen Jensen niver came near this city till eight years after I'd given up me job on the foorce."

"Well, then, who or what was it?"

"Ha! Ye may chew yer night stick till ye find out!" cried the night watchman, turning to the south, as the paths of their beats diverged.

Half a block away he could hear Rathbone's clear laughter.

Again his way led him past the window of the importing firm. His worship had to be a brief one, owing to the delay; yet was not an instant's glance as fervent as the gaze of a full minute? He passed on, and, as he did so, something stirred in the subconscious deeps. It was nothing definite, and scarcely was he aware of his sense of uneasiness; yet it persisted. Something was wrong.

He set it down to indigestion.

"'Tis right she is," he thought. "Sure an' I do gobble me food in a hurry. 'T will be sendin' me to a docther yit, an' him chargin' two dollars the call. 'Tis an old fool I am, but niver shall she know I'm admittin' it."

He frowned at his own levity.

Rubbing his nose and his ears, he trudged on through the chill night wind of March.

It was two o'clock, and again O'Rafferty stood before his shrine. Would that mortal woman could be so fair! And yet was not Nora McNally even fairer? So long ago! Was he sure that he remembered rightly?

Again he stared across the gas light, humbly, dumbly aching. Who shall say that the connoisseur, mute before the "Mona Lisa," stands greatly otherwise? Could such a one, indeed, feel much more deeply than our night watchman the mysterious pain of beauty? Here was the unreachable reward, the unfailing solace. Here was no disappointment, no relapse to the grossness of things. The lovely lady!

So adoring, he awoke once more to that sense of the amiss. There was something wrong, and, staring again, he found it, a sense of superstitious awe flooding his heart. The lovely lady had reached nearer to the roses! It could not be, and yet,

and yet, it *was*! Her hand was a good two inches nearer to those ungrasped but unfading blooms!

O'Rafferty gasped, shivering, not for the cold, and heard a sudden voice in his ears.

"Well, dad, thinking of going into the importing trade? Been offered a job as junior partner?"

The night watchman turned. It was Rathbone, bound homeward at the end of his vigil.

"The lovely lady!" he gasped.

"I don't get you," replied the younger man. "What lovely lady? Oh, yes—now I get you. You mean the dame on the big safe. Won't she get up and do a coochie for you?"

Rathbone laughed at his own pleasantry.

"Her hand!" quavered O'Rafferty. "Her hand is nearer to the roses! She's goin' to grab them roses yet. 'Tis a miracle we're seein'!"

"Hand? Roses? What the hell? You mean—"

Rathbone, too, stared down the long, well lit room. What was it his sharper eyes saw, his keener mind deduced? His grasp was suddenly hard on his elder's arm.

"Turn your back! Turn your back to the window with me!" he ordered. "Now stand here and talk as if nothing had happened—just for a minute, just for half a minute. Don't act as if you'd noticed anything. Don't—"

"Noticed annything, indade!" This from O'Rafferty.

"Now take this key, go up to the corner of Grand and Scott—it's only two blocks—and send for a patrol wagon and six men. Hurry! Hurry, now!"

O'Rafferty grasped the key, blindly and obediently, and hurried to the appointed task.

"Sure," he soliloquized, "an' he's in a divil of a hurry! What can he see wrong with her tryin' to grab a few flowers? 'Tis a praste that he'd better be sindin' for."

He came to the red box and shot in the key. The patrol wagon arrived with a rush, cascading large men in blue. They took the aged doors of Ransom, Ransom & Co. in a rush, and as they did so the whole face of the vault, lovely lady and all, toppled forward and fell incontinently to the floor; but behind it—behold—was still the front of the safe, with the old, the real, the genuine lovely lady, now no near-

er to the goal of her desire. Outlined against the black-painted steel were the forms of four men, their hands raised high, as if in supplication!

IV

HARRY RANSOM, successor to the riches and the title of his father, was correcting newspaper accounts of the occurrence for the benefit of several cronies in the Ancestors' Club.

"A shrewd scheme!" he concluded. "They knew we were safe so long as the room was all lit up; so what do the rogues do but have a big screen painted, just the size of the façade of the vault? They got the coast clear, got in at the front door—there's no other—without any trouble, and set up their screen right before the safe; and back of that they were working at their leisure. They'd have been through and away in another hour."

He shuddered, and gulped hastily at his Scotch and soda.

"Who got on to this gentle little game?" asked one of the group.

"The police tried to claim credit for the whole works, but it was really our own man, a night watchman by the name of O'Rafferty, who caught on. He noticed that something was wrong with the front

of the safe. The girl on it hadn't been painted just right, I believe."

"Rewarded him, I suppose?" wheezed the elder Hungerford.

"I should say we did! A five-thousand-dollar farm over in Jersey. He wanted it in cash, but his wife came around and held out for the farm. Sensible woman! He'd never have hung on to the money, and she has a land hunger."

"Pretty stiff reward, seems to me," commented another of the group.

"My good grief, man!" exclaimed Harry Ransom. "Do you know how much was in that safe? No, and you're not going to!"

More negligible comment, and the group melted away, leaving Ransom and the elder Hungerford to finish their Scotch.

"Do you know," Ransom went on, "I'd never have imagined how much sentiment the man had worked up about the old firm. Listen to this—he insists on having a photograph, and a colored photograph at that, of the front of the safe. Won't leave the city without it. Can you imagine it?" Ransom seemed at once flattered and puzzled. "Sense of solidarity," he muttered. "True to the old firm!"

But you and I and O'Rafferty, formerly night watchman, know better.

LEAN LIGHTLY, LAUGHING LOVERS!

LEAN lightly, laughing lovers, lightly,
If lean you must
Against the back of this old bench.
Something radiant as the dust
Of stars has shone here whitely.
Shoulders as soft as wings
Brushed it one night of loveliness. It brings
Poignantly to one heart the touch of things
As lovely, fingers like petals,
Cheeks more flowerlike still.
It is not empty. Whoever settles
Against the back of this old bench
Should lightly lean, but not love lightly.
Romance glowed brightly
Here one rare evening, clings
Here and forever will,
Though it resuffer nightly
The sharp intolerable wrench
Of spirit torn from spirit.
Aye, laughing lovers, lean lightly
Against the back of this old bench,
And love not lightly near it.

Richard Butler Glaenser

The Good Fixer

OUR HERO PROUDLY BOWS HIS HEAD TO RECEIVE A CROWN,
BUT IT TURNS INTO A DUNCE'S CAP DURING THE CEREMONY

By Richard Howells Watkins

FROM the beginning, I had some misgivings about that transatlantic voyage, but certainly it was not within the power of the human imagination to perceive what distressful consequences it held for me.

At first young Mr. Alwyn Westlea appeared to me to be of agreeable disposition, although not, of course, in brain or in bearing worthy to be the son of so eminent and dignified a man as Hurlburt Talcott Westlea.

That I was flattered by the confidence reposed in me by so distinguished an ornament of the bar of New York State as former Judge Westlea, I will not deny. But hereafter I shall examine with great attention every phase of a proposition presented to me, regardless of the renown of the gentleman who offers it.

Standing on the promenade deck of the steamship *Orania* that sunlit June sailing day, Judge Westlea gazed upon his son with mournful eyes.

"Look at him!" he said to me. "There he is, leaning over the rail to stare at a girl in the tourist third-class quarters, instead of looking about for suitable companions of his own station. He is a failure as a lawyer and a failure as a gentleman. Why, he asked me once if he could take a—job—in a department store—in the employment section. So he could meet sales clerks, I presume. He is flippant—yes, flippant, and lacking in brain power."

I sighed, so that this father might know that my heart was sorrowing with him in his trouble.

"Democracy, Hansard, is an excellent thing, in its place," my distinguished friend went on in a sad voice. "I am, I hope, too good an American citizen to disparage it. But when a young man introduces to

his father in his own home a fellow who turns out to be a six-day bicycle rider, and when he deliberately makes his father's butler—a man who has been with me for six years—burst into laughter at a formal dinner—"

His voice faltered for an instant. I shook my head regretfully, although I had heard the story from him before. He conquered his emotion and continued:

"Then, Hansard, action must be taken to correct this mistaken young man's views."

"Yes, sir," I agreed.

"You also are a young man of wealth and position, Hansard. The only thing you lack is a place of importance in the legal world. There I may perhaps be of assistance to you, provided that you convince me that you are also a man of infinite tact and—ah—diplomacy. Westlea, Smathers & Blunt stand in need of young blood—of the right sort."

My heart fluttered at the mention of that famous firm of lawyers whose conduct of the defense in the case of *Blanders vs. Wagstaff* will be remembered while law exists.

"You are older than my son, Hansard, by several years, and should have the power of discretion well developed," he went on. "I am keeping Alwyn short of cash, for the less money he has the less trouble he is likely to get into. The five thousand dollars I am confiding to your care is for emergency use only. Turn it over to his sister, Lady Havenbury, when you and he reach her home in Sussex. Guard my son from all—ah—entanglements with people not of his class until he reaches Lady Havenbury, and you will find that Westlea, Smathers & Blunt will not forget you."

I was visibly affected. "You may depend upon me, sir," I assured him. "I will lead him in the right direction; turn his mind from the low standards of compan—"

At this moment Alwyn Westlea, who is really a presentable young man with quick blue eyes and light brown hair, abandoned his scrutiny of the tourist class girl and strolled up.

"Well, dad," he said cheerily, ignoring his father's obvious disapproval of the interruption, "I see that you've a bit of will power left. Pulling yourself away from court tanglefoot after all these years to travel in foreign—"

"What are you babbling about?" Judge Westlea rebuked. "You know I'm not sailing with you."

Alwyn nodded, glancing over the side of the ship.

"Yes," he admitted, "but the captain doesn't."

Judge Westlea turned to follow the direction of his son's eyes, and perceived that only one gangplank remained. The warning gongs and cries had rung in our ears unheeded!

With an incoherent shout the gentleman bolted toward the gangway, leaving me alone with my charge.

Alwyn watched his father travel with great attention, and a genial smile, and then suddenly slumped against the bulwark and emitted a deep groan. All the cheerfulness vanished from his face.

II

THE roar of the whistle smote our ears as the gangplank had been removed the instant that Judge Westlea sprang upon the pier.

"Exiled!" Alwyn moaned, as the vessel backed slowly into the North River. "Deported as an indigestible citizen!"

The strength of the emotion to which he gave vent was alarming. I became aware, too, that one of his eyes was regarding me fixedly through the hands that covered his face, as if he looked to me for comfort.

"It isn't as bad as all that, is it?" I inquired with gentle solicitude.

Alwyn lowered his hands.

"Hansard—in fact, we'll make it Hans, if you don't mind—you are still a young man," he said impressively, and with an absurd assumption that his age was greater than mine. "You have your life before you. Take this word of advice from one

whose existence is a mere empty waste: never step between a gentleman and his butler. Trouble will come of it."

I did not answer. I was much too worried by Alwyn's ponderous gloom to say anything.

"There was I—the favorite and only son of my father," he went on pathetically. "Pampered, petted, maintained in all the style of a Pomeranian. And then what? A moment of weakness at a dull and dreary dinner—a faint mimicry upon my countenance of the habitual expression of benevolence on the face of a fellow guest who is out on bail—a guffaw from Thompson, as he entered with the duck, and ruin—utter ruin, for me."

He mourned. I watched him with apprehension.

"Naturally father was going to fire Thompson, but Thompson beat him to it and turned in his resignation. That, of course, made him valuable—indispensable. But Thompson was peeved and inflexible. 'Choose between him and me,' he said, in effect. Of course dad could live without a son much more easily than without a butler, so here I am on the Orania."

"Too bad—too bad, Alwyn," I said in my strong, comforting voice.

"Make it Al," he corrected, and then, abandoning his gloom as swiftly as it had descended upon him, he surveyed me sharply.

"But what yells out loud for an answer is why dad exiled you, too."

"I? I?" I faltered, for his change of manner was too swift to enable me to marshal my wits at once.

"You! You!" he replied inflexibly. "With whose face have you been taking liberties. Or have you been tickling dad's elevator starter down town?"

"No!" I denied stoutly. "I—the truth of the matter is I'm going—for the trip."

"Just for the ride?" Alwyn asked, his keen eyes intently upon me. I had for an instant an uncomfortable feeling. That eye, although lacking the sober dignity of Judge Westlea, had something of his piercing quality in it.

"Yes," I answered, "that's it." And then, with a sudden flash of that tact which the judge had discerned in me, I added:

"And, of course, for the purpose of meeting the right sort of people—socially—you know. That is the great advantage of an ocean voyage."

"Ah—socially!" he exclaimed reflectively. "Socially. That's the pith of it. Quite."

His eye, when he turned it upon me again, was no longer piercing; it was merely cheerful.

"Well, Hans, old turnip, I hope you find your social pearls," he said briskly. "But keep that sense of humor of yours under control or it will get you into trouble."

And, giving me no time to request him not to call me that detestable nickname, "Hans," he swung around and walked rapidly away.

I watched him depart, restraining an impulse to pursue him. But again diplomacy came to my aid. If I accompanied him now he might get some inkling of my real purpose, and that, of course, would not do.

Thoughtfully, I walked to my steamer chair and sat down. Though I am a fine figure of a man, weighing, perhaps, a trifle more than is necessary, I have no weakness for athletics, and I was naturally somewhat spent after my efforts in embarking.

But my mind was active. While the ship turned half its length in the middle of the river and wended its course down the bay I devoted myself to an analysis of the situation, employing that keenness and logic which will, I believe I may say without vainglory, win me a distinguished place at the bar.

Obviously, this safeguarding of young Alwyn from his own weakness was a task upon which my whole future hinged. Succeed, and the favor of Judge Westlea would light my path.

Fail, and the frown of his anger would shadow my whole legal career. I must be cautious, but I must also be ruthless, if occasion demanded.

The thought of caution aroused a new train of thought in my mind, and I hastened to the purser's office, where I deposited in the safe the five thousand dollars Judge Westlea had given me, with that prudence which was one of his outstanding merits, as an emergency fund. I also turned over for safekeeping most of my own funds and valuables.

It then occurred to me that I had perhaps given my young charge rope enough, in his search for excitement, and so I set out to find him. My quest took me far.

The Orania is not a large vessel; indeed,

I believe her fifteen thousand tons makes her one of the smaller liners, but I thought her of vast size before I finished my tour. The vessel is divided into first and tourist classes, and the first class occupies the fore and middle portions of the ship, while the tourists are quite properly relegated to the stern.

Suffice it to say that I visited every one of the public rooms, lounge, smoke room, library, and the like, and passed through all the passages upon each deck in the first class without result. Finally, in desperation, I entered the tourist, or third class, my heart beating with apprehension.

Could Alwyn have given way already to his taste for plebeian companionship? I hoped not, but common sense told me that a man who would descend to attempting to arouse the risibles of a butler during a formal dinner could be guilty of anything. For all I knew, he might be somewhere in the bowels of the ship, playing at dice or cards with the engineers or stokers!

With quickened pace I pursued my investigation of the tourist class. The people, I noted, were for the most part young, and much given to an easy gayety which is inexcusable among gentle-folk, even upon a holiday.

They all appeared to know one another, too, although how introductions could have properly been accomplished in the short time since the Orania had left her pier was more than I could understand. They viewed my search with undisguised interest, and I even caught one comment, as I mopped my forehead, in which the word "fat" was used.

I am not fat; I am well built, and my bones are properly covered with flesh. I am inclined to perspire freely when I indulge in undue exertion, but I am not fat.

III

HAVING exhausted the possibilities of the public rooms of the third class, I returned to deck again, despairingly. As I left the companionway my eyes fell upon two pairs of legs, the owners of which were concealed behind a boat.

I looked up, and perceived, peering over the top at me, the grinning face of Alwyn and a girl companion—the very one that I had perceived him staring at while I conferred with his father.

Fortunately I am of a strong physique, for surely I would have fainted otherwise.

The very worst possible thing had occurred—this woman of the third class had attracted Alwyn to her! Why had I not, with my clever brain, anticipated that possibility?

Although my heart was leaden, I walked toward them with an unemotional countenance. They laughed together as I approached.

"What's the matter, Hans? Mislaid your derrick?" Alwyn asked.

I deduced instantly that they had been aware of my search.

"I was looking for you, Alwyn," I replied meaningly, "though I did not expect to find you down here in the steerage."

It was a palpable hit. The girl colored at once, but managed to do so rather becomingly.

In justice, I may say that she was rather a pleasing young woman with dark brown hair and a light, slightly tanned complexion. Her features were delicately shaped.

But these things mean nothing in these days when some of our best people are unfortunate in their personal appearance. Alwyn's face became instantly less jovial.

"This isn't the steerage, Hans," he said sharply. "The Orania does not carry steerage, and I had hoped it didn't carry cattle, either."

While I was puzzling over his obscure reference to cattle, he turned to the girl. "Coralie, may I introduce a young fellow who wants my father to give him a job, Mr. Hansard; Hans, this is Miss Falmer."

The insult of that introduction robbed me of speech, and I am quite certain that the girl, as she bowed, suppressed a giggle. Although she had said or done nothing, she gave me the impression of being a high-spirited, lively young woman.

Certainly, she was no companion for a susceptible young man like Alwyn. In fact, I decided that she was probably an adventuress, and had already selected young Westlea as a likely victim.

"I object—" I began hotly, and then restrained myself. After all, the important thing was to get him away from that girl as soon as possible.

"I came down to get you," I said diplomatically. "It will soon be time for lunch. I am sorry that Miss Falmer cannot join us."

The deftness of this reminder that the girl was third class did not escape him.

"If you want me, get a writ of *habeas corpus*," he said shortly. "Come on, Coralie; let's walk."

They slipped out from behind the boat and walked forward. I followed instantly, and ranged myself on the other side of the girl.

"Hello, we've started a walking club," Alwyn remarked, glancing at me. "All right, Coralie, let's get some real exercise out of this."

"Let's," the girl agreed, and she quickened her pace.

What I had already endured upon that hot day, breathless even in the wide stretch of the lower bay, was as nothing compared to what I went through then.

Side by side, we paced around the stern and forward along the right side lower deck that was used by the tourist class as a promenade. Then down the other side, around the stern, and forward again, while I struggled for breath and grimly persevered. On and on we walked.

The bugle announced luncheon, but they paid no heed, nor did I, beyond remarking pointedly that it was time for luncheon. The deck, which had been well filled at first, emptied promptly.

Finally, when only a few were left on deck, Coralie Falmer halted.

"Now let's play follow the leader!" she proposed. "Come on!"

Before I could protest to Alwyn he was off, following her fluttering skirt and nimble figure up a ladder to a small superstructure which corresponded to the boat deck of the first class. I pursued inexorably, only to discover that they had fled down the other side again.

On I trotted after them, around a great hatchway and among the interstices of a number of winches and derricks. My heart was thumping now, but I did not falter. I felt that my career was at stake.

Here occurred that trifling incident which was to contribute so much to what followed. In following the lithe young woman among these obstacles, Alwyn's foot caught in an iron ring in the deck. He fell, sprawling, and I heard something fall from his pocket and slide along the deck.

Alwyn lay where he fell, the wind knocked out of him, and I, following close, almost trod upon him.

"Woof!" he gasped, struggling hard to regain his breath. "Wait a—a minute, Atalanta!"

I perceived at that moment, as I bent beside him, that the object which had fallen out of his pocket was his watch. It lay beneath a drum of one of the winches. Coralie, realizing what had happened, had already stopped, and was returning to the fallen man.

And at that moment, before he had raised himself from his face, and as Coralie bent down to him, I had my inspiration. It was truly that.

For it flashed upon me that if I failed to sever at once the ties of fascination that already were binding him to this girl, then my mission was a failure, and my career seriously, if not fatally, impaired.

Well I knew what Judge Westlea would say and think if Alwyn walked off the boat to meet his sister, Lady Havenbury, with this girl from the third class on his arm.

I acted. While she was looking down at him, rather startled at his mishap, and while he was looking up at her with a rueful smile, I stealthily seized the watch and thrust it into my pocket.

The next instant he was climbing to his feet, assisted by my solicitous hands. He ran his fingers inquiringly over his ribs, counting under his breath.

"All present and accounted for," he reported. "What was that that hopped out of my pocket?"

Discovering the loss of his watch, he bent and searched the deck among the winches. Coralie bent, too, and I, taking care not to stoop so low that I could reach an object on the deck, looked also. I exulted in my quickness of brain, which was to free him from this girl's wiles.

Of course I was, technically, doing her some slight wrong, in my plan to make Alwyn suspicious of her, but this harm was slight compared to the great good I was doing Alwyn and myself. For all I knew, the girl was capable of much worse than purloining a watch. And, moreover, Alwyn could only suspect her; he could prove nothing.

They continued to search, and so did I, but always where Alwyn could see that I did not find the watch. Finally I became bold.

"It certainly tumbled out," I said, indicating a few slivers of glass on the white deck. "Here are bits of the crystal."

Alwyn straightened up. His face was puzzled, reflective.

"It has went," he said, with that light-

ness which was one of his worst defects. "I have heard that time flies, but this is the first ocular proof I have ever seen adduced. We will look no more."

I glanced swiftly at Coralie Falmer. She, too, was puzzled. Her lips were drawn slightly apart, and there were slight puckers of thought upon her forehead. Her eyes met mine, and I looked hastily away, at the deck.

Alwyn endeavored to shake us from our thoughts.

"Forget it," he urged. "It was a good gold watch, but I prized it only for its associations. It was my only trophy of athletic prowess."

"Oh, what a shame!" said the girl.

He chuckled. "Dad gave it to me for forcing my way daily into the subway for three straight months, while I was demonstrating in his office that I was not a lawyer. Well, what do we do now? Feed or athletics?"

"I'm going below," Coralie replied. "Luncheon's half over by now. I'm sorry our little run ended so—mysteriously."

IV

SHE left us, and together we walked back to our own quarters. Alwyn was silent and thoughtful. I parted from him to go to our cabin, on the ground that I must change at once.

I secreted the watch with the broken crystal in a compartment in his own trunk which contained shirts that I knew he would not wear upon the voyage. It was not my desire to take any risk of being charged with trickery.

There was no man on the boat better qualified than I to discourse with Alwyn upon his chosen profession, or rather the profession chosen for him. I decided that I would take the young fellow in hand, as Socrates took his disciples, and lead him along the paths of knowledge and wisdom.

With these good resolves glowing in my mind, I lighted a mild cigar and went up on deck to seek him. Judge of the blow to me when, upon rounding the rear end of the promenade, I saw on the open deck below me, sitting side by side on the canvas hatchway, and talking earnestly, Alwyn and the girl Coralie!

Automatically my feet carried my dazed person on around the promenade once more. Slowly I returned to normalcy.

Could it be that Alwyn was so stupid as

to have missed the obvious implication that the girl had stolen the watch? Or had he—a gleam of hope came to my distraught mind—gone to demand the return of his watch under threat of prosecution?

But whatever was the meaning of that conversation, I must join them at once. Hastily, on the next round I descended the companionway and went toward them.

"Well, Hans; ready for some more athletics?" Alwyn called to me.

I am a voracious man. Therefore I do not deny that I paled at that suggestion. They both remarked it, and mentioned it.

With the ship beginning to roll in most abominable fashion as the result of the ocean swell, and with the inner knowledge that my luncheon had been thorough, rather than wise, a resumption of that foolish rushing about would have been fatal. I threw my cigar overboard; the thing had an abominable flavor.

"No, no; I beg of you!" I implored them, and sank to a place beside Coralie on the hatch. She turned toward me, interestedly. In truth, the girl had a fascination that was hard for men to withstand, even such a man as myself.

I am not susceptible, and am much sought after, but I must record that I was compelled to deal sternly with my emotions as I gazed into her limpid eyes. Undoubtedly the girl was beautiful.

"Have you found the watch?" I inquired, looking beyond her at Alwyn. He kicked the hatch irritably with his heels.

"Must have rolled overboard," he declared.

I looked meaningly toward the bulwark, which was solid iron.

"Down the scuppers," he asserted, as he followed my gaze.

I judged it wise not to pursue the conversation, and, indeed, I would not have pursued it even had I considered it the proper move to make. A peculiar lassitude was overcoming me; a feeling that the world was a dreary place, and that my own lot was singularly unpleasing.

The sun appeared to be paling in the heavens, and the roll of the boat lengthened. Back and forth she rolled; over and back; over and back; over and back; while those two chattered on inanely.

It was then that I was stricken with my most unfortunate illness; an illness that I diagnosed as ptomaine poisoning, although, of course, the rascally and incompetent

ship's surgeon insisted that it was merely seasickness. A preposterous idea; but, of course, the man was an employee of the steamship company.

He based his statement on the ground that many other passengers had partaken of similar food and remained unaffected; but, of course, I may be peculiarly susceptible to ptomaine. Furthermore, mere seasickness cannot account for what I endured.

I was carried to my cabin by Alwyn and several passengers, and remained there for two long days. Concerning what I suffered I shall say nothing, for I was always a stoic.

It was not until we were in mid ocean, upon a balmy day when the ship no longer rolled, that my naturally strong constitution gained a victory over the ravages of my disease, and I arose, as healthy a man as ever, and as vigorous. Truly the control of a strong mind over the body is remarkable.

And with returning health came instantly a returning interest in my problem. My first move upon leaving my berth of pain was to hasten to the tourist quarters.

There I saw no signs of either Alwyn or the girl on deck. The first man I encountered was a lean, grim-visaged young fellow in a cap, who grinned at me in a manner which I first took to be highly offensive.

"Up again, eh?" he said. "Yuh certainly went down for the count that afternoon. And I nearly did, too, after gettin' yuh up to your stateroom. I carried the right leg, Alwyn had your head, a couple more lugged the rest of yuh, and Coralie carried your hat!"

He glanced down at my limb, as if to see if it were still in place.

I was about to move on indignantly, but suddenly it occurred to me that this young man might give me some information about my charge and that Falmer girl. Accordingly I smiled at him.

"I am indebted to you, Mr.—ah—"

"Stager," he said. "Nickname, 'Old'; occupation, journalist; trade, photographer; residence, anywhere."

A reporter! It was with misgivings that I continued:

"Mr. Stager. My name is Hansard, Taylor J. Doubtless you have—heard—"

"Oh, yes," he interrupted. "I shot your ma on the beach at Southampton."

This was rather disconcerting, and certainly untrue. Nevertheless I persisted, with a companionable smile. "And how have things been going since my illness?"

"Well," he replied, "they didn't stop the boat. We've been—"

"Yes?" I interrupted. "And how has Mr. Wes—Alwyn been; and the charming Miss Falmer?"

"Thick!" he said, and winked. "Say, they certainly have taken to each other like a moth and a searchlight. As far as they're concerned the Orania's a canoe for two, and the Atlantic's a brook with thick overhanging trees. Only this mornin' Alwyn asked me what were the prospects for a young married man with a semi-legal training in the newspaper field."

"What!" I gasped.

He nodded, chuckled, and would have poked me in the ribs had I not drawn away from him hastily.

"He's got it bad, when he's willing to work. Guess I'll have a coupla paragraphs to cable back from the other side."

V

I LEFT him, then, but in my aching brain was a grim resolve that he should never cable those paragraphs. Alwyn, despite my efforts, was more than ever a victim of the charms and witchery of Coralie Falmer; but I would change all this.

When I found him, a little judicious questioning revealed a most disquieting state of affairs. I set out to develop the idea in Alwyn's mind that the girl had stolen the watch, and to my vast surprise he did not resent it.

"Of course she grabbed it, my dear Hans," he announced, as we sat in our chairs on deck. "That is why I am interested in her."

"I beg pardon?" I said, somewhat dazed.

"I'm going to reform her," he replied briskly. "I'm going to make her honest, or else—" He brooded darkly.

"Or else—" I prompted, leaning forward.

He looked me full in the face. "Or else, my dear Hans, I'm going to teach her to go after bigger game than gentlemen's watches!"

That nearly caused a relapse upon my part. This from the son of Judge Hurlburt Talcott Westlea! I reeled in my chair before his intent eyes.

"But—but—but—" I began.

"A girl with her beauty and spirit should be a high class adventuress, if any," he said, communing with himself, rather than addressing me. "Millionaires and emperors should fall before her wiles rather than penniless gentlemen whose sole object of value"—he looked at me sadly—"is a gold watch."

I stared at him, and he met my horrified eyes with a blank face. "Do you realize what you are saying?" I demanded.

"Oh, I'm not anxious that she become an adventuress," he murmured thoughtfully; "but I do think she should go out of the watch and wallet business, and all that little stuff! Can you imagine the dismay of Lord Havenbury if he discovered that one of his guests had just lifted his diamond stickpin? There's nothing in the book to tell him how to act in such a terrific social emergency."

"You will introduce her to your sister—and Lord Havenbury?" Mine was a question laden with foreboding.

"Why not?" he asked, placidly. "She may have reformed by that time, and anyhow, she's a dear girl, and I simply can't think of parting from her."

I arose without a word and staggered down the deck. Of what avail was logic, or even pleading, with a man so fatuously blind as that?

But, although I was temporarily unable to protect Alwyn, my mind was at work subconsciously. Not for an instant did I give up my determination to free him from this girl. I must act, but how?

And, as I leaned upon the rail and moodily sought some solution of this dilemma, Alwyn took his place beside me.

"Why give me the glassy eye, Hans?" he asked. "I was just on the verge of going into a business matter with you."

"Proceed," I said coldly.

"Dad, in a moment of illegal anger, when he announced my sailing date, alleged that I was a nitwit, and needed a guardian. Are you violating any codicils, post-mortems, or confidences in admitting that you are acting in that capacity?"

So he had guessed my secret mission!

"Exactly," he murmured cheerily, as I maintained silence. "Now the duty of a guardian is to shell out to the guarded. How about loaning me—in behalf of dad—five thousand dollars?"

"Five thous— Did your father tell you

about that emergency—" I burst out in surprise and then suddenly stopped.

But it was too late. My natural surprise, entirely excusable, as I see it, had given me away.

"Aha!" he said eagerly. "The emergency fund! Well, the emergency has emerged. That five thousand will do splendidly. Between you and me, a honeymoon isn't so much without a bit of cash."

I whirled upon him, and shook my finger in his face, as I have seen Judge Westlea shake his at a recalcitrant witness.

"So!" I said indignantly. "You admit it! You would marry this—this—girl thief. Well, you will never get a cent of that money while I draw breath. Never! Never!"

He blinked before my rage, and lowered his voice:

"Slow down, Hans, or you'll be driving me out of the old homestead into the swirling blizzard. Am I to understand that you look with some slight disfavor upon this request for assistance?"

"Yes," I said crushingly. "Yes!"

And turning upon my heel, I strode away. At the end of the deck I stopped at the main stairway and glanced back to note the effect of my words.

Alwyn was leaning against the rail, with his hands in his pockets and his head on his chest, and his eyes were closed. I recognized the position as one which Judge Westlea sometimes assumed when he was deep in thought.

And while I, too, pondered over the tourist class girl, a new inspiration leaped into my fertile brain. It was absurdly simple, and yet required infinite tact and diplomacy.

VI

THAT night I hurried through dinner, and was out of the dining saloon before Alwyn had finished his salad. Along the deck and down the stairs to the tourist third I hurried.

As I hoped, I found Coralie Falmer already in her steamer chair, in a dimly lighted nook between two lifeboats. Masterfully I slipped into the chair beside her—the chair that Alwyn customarily occupied.

"Oh, good evening, Mr. Hansard," she said, in a noncommittal voice, as she discerned my features in the gloom.

"Good evening, Miss Falmer," I replied,

in a sonorous, and not, I trust, unpleasant voice. "Or may I call you Coralie?"

The boldness of this quite startled her, as I had intended it should, and she laughed faintly to cover her embarrassment. Deny it as women will, the bold, masterful man is the one that is apt to make their hearts flutter.

When Alwyn arrived he found us—or rather me—deep in a discussion of love, beauty, the moon, and similar allied topics. Coralie was silent, for the most part, as is proper in a woman when a man speaks of romance on a dark night.

"Look here, Hans," Alwyn said, with more acerbity in his voice than I had yet perceived, "if you want to moon about the moon go up on the boat deck, where you can see it better. Miss Falmer and I wish to finish a chess game."

"I leave you to his mercies, Coralie," I retorted with good-humored raillery, arose and left her.

It was contrast that I desired to bring out between the witty, well-to-do, not unhandsome, legal light and man of position, and Alwyn, the dull, unindustrious ne'er-do-well and despair of his family. Certainly no woman—and particularly a poor woman—could fail to perceive the advantages that a possible union with me held out.

That was the lure with which I was endeavoring to end this attraction between them. It was done at some cost to myself, of course; for after having disgusted Alwyn by revealing her inconstancy, and having freed him from his engagement, there still remained the problem of my getting rid of the girl myself.

The next day I put up a dashing game—descending upon the tourist third like a young Lochinvar out of the west, and playing shuffleboard and deck tennis with a verve and gallantry that more than compensated for my slight lack of skill.

Alwyn, I am happy to say, was completely nonplused. He stood aside and watched me with deep attention, while I boldly held my own with Coralie as partner, against Stager, the photographer reporter person, and a giggly young woman whose name I did not catch.

For the purposes of my strategy I abandoned that social dignity which is mine by nature, and was bluff, hearty, and democratic in the extreme. I even went so far as to tap Stager reprovingly on the shoulder.

der when he knocked my disk out of the plus ten section of the shuffleboard box. He made as if to strike me back with his clenched fist, which alarmed me for a moment, until I realized that that, too, was play among the lower circles.

I repeated my visit next day, flashing upon Coralie like a comet, and staying only long enough to give her a desire for more of my society. Alwyn watched with perplexed eyes.

So jubilant was I with the progress that I was making, that I amused myself by bantering him at dinner. I felt convinced that his mentality would be quite unable to grasp the double meaning of my remarks.

"Ah, Alwyn, you find yourself outdone," I said. "In the game of love a mere tyro like myself may beat you."

He inspected me slowly, and I believe he was baffled by my jovial expression.

"It seems to hit you as quickly as seasickness did," he remarked.

"Do not, I beg of you, refer erroneously to my recent illness as that," I reproved him. "Besides, it is not I who am hit, but some one else."

Thus I virtually told him that I was heart-whole, and daringly I went on to reveal more of my subtlety.

"You found me good at games for the reason that I let the other people take them seriously. Shuffleboard is not serious, but sometimes the motive behind the game is."

"The motive behind the game," he repeated, as if wondering what I meant. "So that is what is serious! Hans, steps must be taken in this matter. Long, purposeful steps, since kicks are barred."

I understood him. Having been completely deceived by my figurative language, he was resorting to it himself in an effort to conceal his stupidity. I laughed sardonically.

He arose, and I then perceived that this evening he had been the one to hurry through his meal and neglect his dessert.

"Enjoy yourself while you may," I told him. "I will be there later, and I fancy Coralie will see to it that the chair beside her is vacated when I come."

"Better examine it for tacks," he replied, and left me.

VII

BUT I strode confidently to the nook which once had been the courting place of Alwyn Westlea. The steamer chair beside

Coralie was empty. To what lengths she had been compelled to go to rid herself of him I did not venture to guess.

Being a rather thorough man, I lit a match and carefully surveyed the chair before I seated myself. One can take no chances with a man who jokes with a butler, and he had mentioned tacks. I found none.

Having by this time paved the way by mention of love, moonlight and beauty, I now spoke to the girl of marriage, reciting an outline of the institution since the dawn of history. For it was not my purpose to propose to her when we were still in mid Atlantic.

No, I shrewdly calculated that the climax of our affair, namely, the secret proposal by which I should definitely blast Alwyn's hopes, should occur about forty-eight hours before we reached Southampton. That would give me plenty of time to bring about a quarrel which should break our engagement, just before we left the boat.

That night, when I left her, I was quite certain that her heart was beating wildly. "Good night," my last words had been. "Good night—Coralie—and I shall dream of you."

She was for the moment too overcome to reply, but even in the darkness she bent forward to avert her face from me.

"Good night," she murmured, with a little catch in her voice. "I shall dream of you, too—if I'm not careful."

Thus she voiced her maidenly reserve. For a moment, as I walked away, my heart smote me as I thought how she would suffer when I dismissed her from my thoughts.

Alwyn still lingered in her presence, but at my coming he melted away like an unobtrusive servant. The reporter fellow, Stagger, was occasionally with them, but he, too, did not venture to remain when I appeared.

And then came—that night. After a fresh and brilliant day the sun descended softly into the white wake left by the Orania in her course across the blue ocean.

The breeze was gentle. The voyage was nearing its end; we were soon to reach the English Channel.

The stage was most magnificently set, and the time had come. Frankly, I was glad it had. The strain of being a hearty, hail-fellow-well-met sort of individual, delighting in games and childish persiflage,

was telling upon me, mentally and physically.

There was a moon that night, but it set at ten o'clock. I waited until the Great Bear arose and I saw the North Star higher overhead than it may be seen in the latitude of New York. Then I sought the girl.

She was alone, in the little recess between the lifeboats, and beside her was the empty deck chair that had become mine by right. The deck was empty—for some sort of entertainment was going on below.

I did not long delay my proposal. It would have been too much of a strain. I leaned toward the girl abruptly and seized her hand. I poured forth words, fiery, ardent, altogether overwhelming.

"Coralie! You must be mine!" I said. "What if my birth, wealth, position far surpass yours in the world? I lay them at your feet—with my heart. Say you will be mine!"

But still she was hesitant, uncertain, and appeared to await something more. I arose from the steamer chair, pushed it aside with a sweeping gesture, and gallantly knelt beside her.

"Coralie!" I began, and then, suddenly, an intense, blinding brilliance flared all about us.

I gave vent to an agitated cry, for I feared that a meteor had struck the ship. But the next instant a voice came out of the darkness.

"I got yuh!" it said, in a tone of great satisfaction, and then Coralie exclaimed:

"Oh, it's Stager!"

It was, indeed, Stager, and he was descending from a lifeboat, on the canvas cover of which he had apparently been lying.

"What is the meaning of this?" I burst out, my voice quivering with indignation.

"Flash light," he answered briskly. "What'd yuh think I was tryin' to get, a time exposure?"

"You have taken a picture of—" I began, but another voice, Alwyn's, exclaimed:

"What's happening?"

He came hurriedly into the recess and confronted us.

"What is happening," I said, struggling with my great and justifiable anger, "is that this fellow has dared to take a photograph of me while I was—ah—conversing with Miss Falmer."

"Nothin' to be ashamed of—proposin'

to a girl like that," Stager replied coolly. "Make a good front page for my tabloid paper."

VIII

ALL that I had suffered upon that voyage was as nothing compared to my anguish of that moment. A photograph of me, Taylor J. Hansard, prominent in legal and social circles, vulgarly proposing to a girl of unknown family and position, on the front page of that—that unspeakable sheet!

I swayed upon my feet, and grasped the lifeboat for support. My career seemed to lie shattered at my feet; a great nothingness yawned before me. Ruined—outcast—*déclassé*!

And all because of my innocent little plan to save another man from the consequences of his own folly. Truly, the altruistic suffer.

"I deny it!" I cried. "It is not so! I was not proposing. I was about to arise when my foot slipped, and I fell to my knees. I hardly know this girl—she is not of my world at all."

There was a moment of silence. Then Stager chuckled—a diabolical sound that chilled my blood.

"Better yet!" he exclaimed. "Caption: 'Did He Fall or Was He Pushed?' Of course I heard yuh propose, but we can make a nifty little mystery of it, if yuh want."

He chuckled again, slipped out of the nook and away.

"Coralie!" I cried. "Alwyn! It's all a mistake. Why—what—" And then I realized that they, too, had gone.

Nearly overcome, I dragged myself to my cabin, and to bed, my mind whirling with this catastrophe. I saw nothing but scandal and disgrace before me, and all because of my harmless little scheme to advance myself in the eyes of Judge Westlea.

I must have swooned, for when I came to my senses, light was streaming in the cabin window. The horrible night had passed, and a new day was here—but what a day!

Alwyn was already up, for his bed had been slept in, and he was gone. I arose in a daze, and walked with leaden feet to breakfast. The place opposite me was empty. Nor did I see Alwyn when I went upon deck in the vain hope that the fresh air would revive me.

At 11 A.M., as I sat drearily in my cabin, making fruitless plans and discarding them, there was a knock at the door.

The bedroom steward put his head in in response to my summons.

"Gentleman 'ere to see you, sir," he said gravely. "Name of Westlea."

Automatically I took the card from his hands. It bore the legend:

ALWYN H. WESTLEA

Attorney-at-Law

"What—" I said, and then, sharply: "Show him in."

Westlea, attired in a morning suit, entered the cabin he had occupied with me during the voyage, removed his top hat, and bowed ceremoniously.

"I am here on behalf of my client, Miss Coralie Falmer, Mr. Hansard," he announced solemnly.

"Alwyn, what is—" I began, but he interrupted.

"Let us avoid personalities, Mr. Hansard," he said gravely. "It is my duty to inquire if you persist in denying that you proposed to Miss Falmer last night. If so"—he shrugged his shoulders—"you can't play ducks and drakes with a young woman's heart on the high seas or anywhere else, these days, you know."

I sank back upon my berth and stared at him. He was silent, awaiting my answer with an immovable face.

"She will sue me!" I gasped, as that phase of the situation entered my mind.

"For breach of promise!"

"Heart balm is the phrase now current in journalistic circles," he replied with inhuman coldness. "We have photographic evidence to submit, I may remind you."

IX

HEART balm! A Hansard sued for heart balm!

"Of course you may be prepared to marry Miss Falmer," Alwyn said stiffly. "She is, as you intimated to me yourself on several occasions, completely under the spell of your personality."

"No! No! I can't do that!" I exclaimed hastily. "I must see my fair name dragged through the mire of the—"

"Unless you decide to settle at once," Alwyn interposed stonily. "We are, you understand, in possession of the photographic plate which was the cause of considerable agitation on your part last night, as you no doubt recall."

"You have that!" I said. A gleam of hope showed itself in the darkened clouds about me.

"I acted for her in that matter, too," Alwyn explained.

I made to grip his hand, but he drew back.

"I'll settle," I decided happily, for, after all, the money mattered little to me. "What sum—"

I paused. He meditated with wrinkled brows.

"I should say," he replied at last, "that the sum of five thousand dollars would do. But it must be paid at once, you understand. We aren't in the installment business."

"I'll get it from the purser now," I declared, starting to my feet.

After all, the money had been entrusted to me by Judge Westlea for emergency use, and there could be no doubt that this was an emergency. Later, perhaps, there might be a reckoning between us, but now—I hastened to the office and drew out the money. Alwyn must be given no opportunity to change his mind.

When I returned to the cabin he had already discarded his formal attire for the old knicker suit to which he was absurdly attached.

"There!" I said, pressing the money upon him. "That releases me and destroys that abominable picture."

"It does," he agreed, pushing the roll of bills into his pocket and lying back in his berth. For a moment he was silent, brooding.

"You know, Hans," he said, with a resumption of his customarily informal manner, "that's the first case I ever won at the bar. I think I shall retire from the profession before I lower my percentage. Yes, Hans, I think I'll have a go at employment work. It's sort of interesting, you know, jerking a left-handed bookkeeper off a stool and making a right-handed automobile salesman out of him. Now Thompson should never have been my father's butler. He has the makings of a statesman in him. And you—"

"Your father will never permit you to

desert the law," I said, breaking in on this senseless comment.

X

"He won't," Alwyn agreed. "That's why I'm going to turn adventurer first."

"Adventurer!" I repeated, startled.

"Yes, Hans, I'm going to marry Coralie for her money—this money—and take her on a honeymoon with it."

"But—but I thought she was enamored of me!" I exclaimed.

He wagged his head at me.

"On the rebound, anything may happen to a harrowed heart, Hans," he said.

"Yes, Hans, I think I may be able to marry her for her money and her position. Did you ever hear of the Baltimore Falmers, Hans? Surely, you have. The family's so old and so highly established that a scion may travel tourist third for the fun of it without fear of losing caste."

"But—"

"And then," he went on placidly, "when we get back, maybe I can convince her family I need a job sorting men and jobs in one of their various manufacturing plants."

"But—" I again endeavored to interrupt, completely bewildered.

"But for the rest of the voyage," he broke in, "keep out of that chair beside Miss Falmer. There are tacks in it, Hans!" And with a happy stride he left the room.

And so, despite difficulties and slight misunderstandings, I did manage to guard Alwyn Westlea against low company, as Lord and Lady Havenbury agreed when they met the happy couple at Southampton.

But what will always remain a mystery to me is why Alwyn insisted upon that unspeakable reporter fellow, Old Stager, as best man at his wedding.

TIDAL WAVE

"Lord, I have sinned and I'm ashamed!

Grant me Thy face once more!"

Pallid with incense, rays of light

Crawl from the open door.

(Blossoms are bowed with heaviness.

Parakeets, shrill and vain,

Gather on fragrant, hanging fruit,

Ravaged by burning rain.)

"Allah, I've broken faith again!

Dog of the dust am I!"

There is a stream-bed, facing east,

Barren, with stones, and dry.

(Somewhere, a tide, caressing sand,

Treacherous in its stroke,

Bounds at the rumbling in the air,

Hissing at lava smoke.)

"Lo, the Great Spirit frowns in wrath!

What shall my hunting be?"

He who had never trodden twigs

Tramples the ground with three.

(Travailed, a mountain—racked and torn—

Mourns for an errant sun,

Gathering strength from earthen veins,

Seeking that pain be done!)

Curling with foam, a wave creeps up

Out of an ocean's breast.

Three are the souls that reckon not

Aught of its troubled crest.

What though the shore be swept away?

What though the chasms break?

Thousands of leagues apart, they cry,

"Answer us for Thy sake!"

Sonia Ruthèle Novák

Something to Her Advantage

A STORY OF THE "PERSONAL COLUMN," GIVING A STRIKING ILLUSTRATION OF THE FAMOUS SAYING THAT IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE

By Diana Forbes

HUGH FERGUSSON made a point of glancing at the "personal column" of the *Times* each morning. His eyes lit with amusement at the first announcement:

If the lady wearing blue chiffon motor veil and brooch with device of roses, thistles, and shamrocks intertwined, who helped man to cross Piccadilly Circus after motor collision on Wednesday morning, will stand under the clock at Charing Cross at 8 P.M. this evening, she will hear of something to her advantage. Advertiser is wearing a sling.

This wasn't bad for a start. He scanned the rest of the advertisements hurriedly, though he could scarcely expect to find anything else equally arresting in the same issue. No, there were only the regular things—Edna in misery because Mascot had failed her; impecunious folk generously offering to accept loans of anything from five pounds upward, on no security save the lenders' kind hearts; out-of-works begging for jobs.

He was out of a job himself—a briefless barrister, living on his means, fed up with loafing.

Well, it was a fine morning, and there was an adventure toward—not his adventure, of course. What had he to do with philanthropic ladies in blue motor veils? Yes, he was sure she was young—if she existed.

He laughed. Of course it was a code—sweethearts or burglars making a clandestine appointment. What an ass he was! Sheila would roast him finely if she heard of it. He wished Sheila would come back, for London was a dull hole without her.

He pushed the paper away and sauntered aimlessly into the street. The bright spring sunshine, the smell of wallflowers

and violets, the crowds of busy people, stirred him to fresh discontent. Back he strolled to his chambers, hoping that some one might call.

The thought of that advertisement recurred to him at intervals during a tedious day; and finally mingled boredom and curiosity took him at the appointed hour to Charing Cross.

Would she be there? Would she be punctual? The man with the sling—would he—

Fergusson stopped short and stared in surprise. Two girls stood by the clock. Both wore blue motor veils, both wore the brooch described. Each, he fancied, eyed the other with hostility, and both glanced up at his approach. There the likeness ceased.

One girl was tall and showily dressed. Her sky-blue veil swathed hair that was too bright and a face too highly colored. Her blue eyes gazed at him boldly. The other was dowdily and even shabbily dressed in some sort of gray-green frieze. Her bronze gold hair gleamed from a veil of peacock blue, and the eyes that shyly lifted as he drew near were dark and velvety.

For a moment Fergusson and the dark-eyed girl contemplated each other in silence. Then he opened a newspaper and awaited developments. The other girl paced up and down restlessly, sometimes making little excursions to the bookstall and to buy sweets.

It was during the tall girl's second absence that Fergusson broke the ice.

"Pardon me, are you wanting help with luggage or anything? There seem to be very few porters about."

The dark-eyed girl smiled.

"I was wondering whether you would take the plunge," she said. "I hoped you would. No, I'm waiting to hear of something to my advantage."

He smiled courteously in response.

"And is this supposed to be a good place for that?"

She gave him a shrewd glance, then turned away without answering.

Fergusson waited passively for a fresh opening. It came from an unexpected quarter.

A burly man with a pronounced limp and a sling strolled up and spoke to the dark-eyed girl. Fergusson could not hear what was said, but he saw the look of mingled fear and amusement in her startled eyes, saw her shrink away, and saw the man press forward. Then she made a little sound of appeal.

That was enough for Fergusson. He was at her side in an instant, saying coolly:

"I think you've made a mistake, sir. This young lady was waiting for me." Then, as he saw the second blue-veiled damsel returning, he continued: "Perhaps that is your friend."

The man laughed.

"Perhaps it is! One never knows."

Fergusson grinned. Perhaps, like himself, the burly man was out for sport. The limp with which he walked off was obviously fictitious, and the solicitude of his companion, she of the sky-blue motor veil, was surely a trifle overdone.

"You seem very much interested in them."

Hugh turned with a start.

"I am. I was just wondering—" He broke off abruptly. "You didn't mind my interference just now, I hope?"

"No," she said in rather a weary little voice; "and I don't think anything to my advantage will turn up to-night, so I shall go."

She gave a fresh turn to his bewildered thoughts. Had she been the genuine helper, after all? Had she taken that humbug for a real case of distress, and been bilked of her reward by an impostor? Anyhow, Fergusson felt that he must not lose sight of her yet. A dinner together would be interesting.

She yielded to his persuasion without much difficulty.

"But you must let me pay my share," she stipulated.

Hugh took her to a little Italian restau-

rant in Soho; the dinner on those terms would have to be a modest one.

As they sat facing each other over a jar of glowing yellow daffodils, it struck him for the first time that she was rather charming; but he wished that Sheila could teach her how to dress. The color of her clothes was agreeable, but he shuddered at the cut. Sheila would call her "arty," and no condemnation could go further than that.

"Do you know you're crumbling all your bread?" she asked reproachfully.

"How untidy! I'm unspeakably ashamed, Miss—Miss—"

"My name is Joan Murray."

"Thanks! Mine's Fergusson—no occupation."

"I'm sorry," she said softly, noticing the shade of bitterness in his voice. "I'm not very useful myself."

"What do you do besides being altruistic in Piccadilly?"

"Altruistic in Picca—then you *did* see that advertisement?"

"I did. Why this surprise? Have some Chianti—it's very good here."

"I thought—well, you seemed puzzled when I said I was waiting to hear of something to my advantage, and—and—"

She broke off in confusion, coloring under his quizzical gaze.

"Did you help that chap across Piccadilly?"

"No—no—I mean—I will not be cross-examined like this!"

"Sorry! It's an old bad habit, I'm afraid. I used to be at the bar. You haven't told me yet what else you do; or is that a secret, too?"

"No. I help in an East End crèche in the morning. In the afternoon I earn some pence with black and white drawings for women's papers—fashions, mostly. In the evening—"

She paused, and her eyes grew dreamy. "In the evening?" he prompted.

"Oh, in the evening I usually try to paint the sky, and fail rather badly."

"So you help run a crèche, and partly earn your living, and then complain you're not very useful!"

"Ah, but I want to paint," she said wistfully, "and I'm no use at all at that."

"I wish I could see your stuff. People never can judge their own things."

She brightened at once, and, when Hugh left her at the door of her tiny flat, it was

with an invitation to tea for the following day.

He walked to his rooms in the Temple, feeling distinctly elated. After all, he was not going to have such a slow time without Sheila. That was a delightful little dinner. Some day he would overcome the dark-eyed girl's objection to being treated, and would take her to Dieudonné's or somewhere decent; but he could hardly do that till she was properly turned out. Poor little soul, she evidently had a struggle to get turned out at all. Fashion drawings! It was the old story of the shoemaker's wife, for he had seldom seen a more unfashionable individual than Joan Murray.

II

NEVERTHELESS, Hugh found her very pleasing to look at when she greeted him the next day in a smock of a golden brown color that brought out all the wonderful tints of her hair. What a shame to smother it with a motor veil!

"I hope you won't break out of the flat anywhere!" she said, with dancing eyes, as she showed him into the minute sitting room.

"Oh, but this is jolly!" His gaze wandered from the pale gray walls hung with water colors to the tea table, which was decorated with a big copper bowl of violets. "What a feast! Honey—it is honey, isn't it?—cakes, sandwiches! I say, you really shouldn't, in these hard times."

"I don't often go on a bust," she said, smiling.

"Well, I'll forgive you if you'll set my mind at rest on just one point. I know I've no earthly right to ask again, but do you know anything about that chap we saw yesterday at Charing Cross?"

She was rather taken aback by the question, and for just a second she hesitated, the color coming and going in her cheeks. Fergusson became still more eager to know. After a moment she rallied, saying in a sweetly chiding voice:

"Is this what you call a frontal attack? You're rather mean to begin before I'm fortified with some tea!"

He was forced to abandon his point temporarily. After tea she produced some of her canvases, and waited anxiously for his verdict.

"You know I'm here on false pretenses," he pleaded. "I'm not really a critic. They

seem awfully good to me. I'd like Sheila to see these."

"Who is Sheila—an artist?"

"She's my cousin, and a good judge of this sort of thing. You must meet some day; she's away just now. Sheila can be a lot of help to any one she likes."

"Help? What sort of help?" Joan asked, careful to keep any trace of resentment from her voice.

She did not want this unknown cousin's patronage or help. As she looked at Hugh's dark, well shaped head bent over her work, she found herself wishing that there was no such person as Sheila. It was absurd to care, of course! Why, she had never seen him till yesterday, and here she was already—

"Oh, there are lots of ways in which people can help each other," he was saying, "and Sheila's clever at most things."

"Is she pretty?" Joan asked carelessly.

"Simply stunning, and dresses beautifully. She's—"

He went off into a long eulogy of Sheila's various points, while Joan, with flushed cheeks, stacked the canvases together.

"Dresses beautifully"—those two words rankled all the evening in Joan's mind.

"I suppose he thinks she could teach me that," she reflected, when Hugh had gone. "What idiots men are! Just as if I couldn't dress well, if I had the chance! He'd be surprised if he knew that old thing I had on yesterday was a dyed frock of Aunt Caroline's. Well, he'd be surprised at other things, too, if he knew; but if I spend my last penny, I'll be decently dressed to meet his wonderful, perfect cousin!"

She sat on her bed for some time pondering ways and means.

III

HUGH, still anxious to get a clue to his mystery, had managed to arrange another meeting. They were to go together to see the bluebell woods at Kew. Perhaps she would relent a little this time; but if she refused? Was he to pursue the game indefinitely?

And if she were to tell? Would they meet no more? Would he care? How would Sheila take it? Would she mind his having found consolation in her absence? Oh, no, Sheila was too big to mind, although he had sworn that London would be as dull as ditch water without her. Hith-

erto he had always been Sheila's slave, had yielded undivided allegiance; and Sheila valued that.

Well, it was not worth while to go on analyzing. The prospect of Kew lay pleasantly before him, and the next step must take care of itself.

Conscious of the definite purpose in his mind, he found Joan's delight almost embarrassing.

"It makes one feel religious to be so thankful for anything," she said, and stooped to caress a clump of bluebells at her feet.

It was a wonderful day. The soft southwest wind made a faint whisper in the trees, which were clad in their first young garments of shining green. Great white clouds moved regally across a sky of varying blues.

Joan's radiant eyes made him feel uneasy. Was he conceited to fancy that it was not only the beauty of the woods that filled her artist soul with joy? Had he anything to give in exchange, if her radiance were not merely for the sky and the bluebells?

As he wondered, a strange thing happened. The ground was still slippery from a recent shower. Joan stumbled and, but for his supporting arm, would have fallen. She released herself instantly; but Hugh, tingling from the contact, found himself wishing he could have held her longer.

Did he hope it was all for the bluebells? He scarcely knew.

They walked on silently. It was not till they were homeward bound that he found courage to return to the charge once more.

"About that advertisement, now—" he began lightly.

She looked at him, mischief in her eyes; and at that moment he knew that he was beaten, that she would not tell. He also knew that he must go on meeting her for his own sake.

"Sheila will be back some time next week," he remarked with sudden irrelevance.

"But what has that to do with the advertisement?" Joan asked innocently.

He made a gesture of defeat.

"Nothing at all; but it's even more important. Will you come to tea at my rooms in the Temple? Sheila will be there to pour out."

Joan made a hasty calculation. Could

she get new things in time? Debenham's were punctual folk. Hat—shoes—gloves—oh, those were easy to manage!

"Promise to come—come on Thursday," he urged.

Thursday found him in a state of feverish anticipation. He moved restlessly about the room, rearranging roses and adjusting cushions, till a knock at the door made him jump. His heart sank at sight of the orange envelope tendered to him by a brutally unconcerned small girl.

Sorry cannot possibly come—Paul has slight relapse.
SHEILA.

He read the words with guilty relief. Then he would have Joan all to himself!

When she came, a few minutes later, he stared at her with incredulous eyes. Who was this dainty creature? Her hat had just the right curve, her tunic and skirt alike fell in soft, beautiful folds of golden brown. A gleaming plaited girdle—it looked like satin—charmingly defined her slender figure. She moved with the grace of a dancer.

"Aren't you going to say, 'How do you do?' Or don't you know me in different clothes?"

"Which is you—to-day or before?"

"Oh, come, they can't make as much difference as that," she protested, sinking into his offered armchair; "but where is your cousin?"

"She can't come—Paul's not so well," he murmured absently, still intent on the change in Joan. "Tell me, which is you? Are you a princess in disguise, or what?"

"Or a poor artist in disguise? Justifiable camouflage! Who is Paul?"

"Paul? He's Sheila's kid, down with measles."

Joan turned pale. Then Sheila was married—a widow, no doubt. She strove desperately to control her voice as she put the question.

"A widow? I hope not. She wasn't—what's the matter? Are you faint?"

"No, you live up such a lot of stairs. Shall I pour out?"

"I say, I hope you're all right," he said anxiously. "You're not a bit yourself to-day."

"I thought I looked rather nice."

"I'm not going to be had like that. You always look stunning, and you know it; but—"

A sudden suspicion crossed his mind. Had she, after all, heard of something to her advantage? Was this gay plumage the first fruit? He felt that the mystery had grown unbearable. He must know the truth.

"Joan!"

"Yes?"

"Joan, dear, listen, and don't play with me to-day. There's something you must tell me. All my happiness is bound up in it."

All his happiness! She leaned forward, with parted lips.

"Go on!"

"Joan, there isn't any one else, is there?"

She sighed with relief, and nestled into his arms; but after one embrace he drew slightly away, yet holding her hands firmly in his own.

"And now tell me, did you help that bouncer across Piccadilly?"

She hung her head, whispering:

"No."

"He was an impostor. He wasn't as lame as I am. Do you know who the girl was—the other one in the blue veil?"

"She was an impostor, too."

"But, Joan, how do you know, if you didn't help him? Did you help any other man?"

"No. I—I went because of the advertisement. Oh, Hugh, don't think badly of me! I just couldn't help it. The spring

got into my blood, and I simply had to have an adventure."

His own case, he had to admit; but still he was not satisfied. He released Joan's hands, and his voice sounded a little stern.

"You went because you saw the advertisement. Then how do you know the other girl was an impostor?"

"Oh, dear, how I *wish* you weren't a barrister!" she faltered unhappily, twisting a button on his coat.

"Joan, please don't trifle with me!"

"What an awfully tyrannical husband you'll make! Well, you see, I can't help knowing, because I made up that advertisement myself. I was so dull and lonely! I haven't any people except old Aunt Caroline, who lives at Bath; and I was getting simply desperate for some one to speak to. I know it wasn't a thing a nice girl would do; but I thought if nobody decent came, I needn't speak at all. So I put it in the *Times* and trusted to luck. That nasty man must have come just for the fun of it, and so must the girl; and you came, and I liked the look of you—oh, Hugh, you're crushing me to death!"

"And now," she said, when tea was over, and they had disposed themselves for rational conversation, "perhaps you'll explain what *you* were doing there?"

"The spring was in my blood, too. I went, like you, to see if I could hear of something to my advantage."

"And did you?" Joan asked softly.

ADVENTURE

If I were by my fire and the rain
Came aslant and cold against the pane,
Drumming, and my kettle sang for tea,
And there was smell of cooking, sweet to me,

Who loves the taste of hot, brown-crust'd bread,
And the gold bark curled up before the red
Bite of the flame and, from my chimney-seat,
I heard the rain grow harsher into sleet:

If I were by my fire and the pane
Was tapped by a light finger, once—again,
And hearing it I rose and raised the blind
And peered into the dreary night to find
What rapped upon the glass, and suddenly

A face appeared, a brown hand beckoned me—
I would forget the kettle sang for tea,
I would put on my hat and coat and go
Breasting myself against the bitter blow.

Gostwick Roberts

Red Blood

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE WAR SPIRIT OF A LONG BANISHED TRIBE RETURNS TO STRENGTHEN THE ARM OF A WEAKLING IN AN HOUR OF DIRE NEED

By Don Cameron Shafer

THE mark of the Mohawk was upon old Seth.

Only a few red drops ran in his veins, it is true, diluted and diffused through several generations, but still he had sufficient Indian blood to bequeath to him the inherent tribal markings of a people long since exiled to Canada.

Seth was a bent little old man, his swart face a thousand wrinkles, in which glittered two dark animal eyes. His coarse white hair dangled from beneath a shabby, sweat stained hat, his scant drooping Mongol mustaches were like the ropy mane of an old gray horse.

The withered, dwarfed figure of a simple old man dealing in simples; on his humped, bony back a time polished wooden box, supported by a worn leather strap, containing the homely root and herb remedies he peddled from house to house.

Uplifted, now, before his shuffling old feet, was a rutted mountain road, arched with gaunt hickories and shaggy oaks, hedged with scarlet plumed sumacs and a tangle of old berry canes. A steep road, a hard road, water washed and stone studded, growing ever rougher and steeper the higher it climbed—it was much like the long road of life that old Seth had traveled for so many years.

Under his faltering feet this familiar mountain road seemed to hump itself upward into new and all but insurmountable barriers, to wind and twist endlessly away before him. Loose stones rolled as though purposely to trip him.

One sockless foot in its broken shoe dragged a bit behind the other—*swish-swish-swish*—through the ripe yellow and purple leaves. The hard going required the assistance of a stout ash staff; the old

man's panting breath came hissing from his toothless cavern of a mouth.

As Seth limped along through the autumn tinted wood his beady black eyes were alert for any bit of life, however small. In his grimy right fist, more like the claw of some goblin bird, was a little round pebble hardly larger than a marble.

Like gaudy butterflies the frost-painted leaves came fluttering down, and the whisper of their soft caressing of the earth ran through the shadowy wood like fairy music. Out of this bright rain a yellow shafted flicker came swooping onward with noisy screamings, and struck against the smooth, gray bole of a beech tree.

Seth's thin right arm flashed back and forth with uncanny speed, learned in boyhood and practiced all his life. The stone just missed the bird and bounded away through the crisp leaves. The old man shook his gray head and went on.

"Weak I be, an' kinda sick," he muttered, groping in his coat pocket for another missile. "I can't even throw no more!"

A little way ahead a striped yellow chipmunk went scurrying across the road, a bitter acorn in its pouched mouth. It poised on a near-by rock pile, chattering—and another pebble struck it dead. Seth hurried eagerly forward, for many times these little pebbles stunned but did not kill, and slipped the limp little body into a blood-stained coat pocket.

Soon the narrow mountain road, a mosaic of yellow and crimson leaves, topped a rise and stretched its serpentine length in the October sun along a broad bench of sloping upland. There stood a little red house at the edge of a few cleared fields confined within gray stone walls.

And upon the weather-beaten kitchen porch of this homestead sat a girl in faded khaki shirt and breeches, cleaning a fowling piece. She called to Seth cheerily:

"Hello, doctor!"

Seth stopped, panting, leaning heavily upon his staff and shifting the dead weight of his pack. His facial wrinkles rearranged themselves into the semblance of a smile. He liked to be called doctor.

"Ho!" he puffed. "Ho!"

"Come on up and rest," the girl invited pleasantly. "I've got some nice fresh buttermilk and a warm johnnycake."

Seth broke into a clumsy, shuffling trot up the worn pathway.

The old man was starving.

II

ONCE the red men, forbears of these few drops of wild blood in Seth's veins, held all this pleasant land. They were an amicable and contented people, living in comfortable log and bark communal houses; and their great cornfields waved in the August sun the length and breadth of the river bottoms.

Then, one sharp September morning, where the moccasin-worn trail to the eastern gateway topped the Almost Mountains, there stood the great bulk of a bearded man in homespun, a heavy yäger rifle on his arm.

"*Die Friestatte!*" he cried hoarsely, eagerly, to the motley cavalcade behind him—fifty families, their all upon their backs.

In the valley the Palatine villages sprang up, farms appeared—wheat to feed a starving army in seven long years of struggle for liberty. Then the warriors of the Long House, their naked torsos in red infantry coats, their lean loins in blue English shrouds, swept the valley with fire and sword, again and yet again.

For this pitiless warfare these Mohawks were banished forever. Naught remains of them but a few old parchment deeds signed in that same red blood with the totems of the bear and the tortoise, a few potsherds and flints turning up under the plow.

And there had been a time when these hills were well peopled with a breed of simple-minded hunters who were both superstitious and amenable to bitter nostrums, and then Seth's medicine box and fortune telling supported him in some degree of backwoods comfort.

But now these people were nearly all gone, most of the mountain cabins were deserted and the upland farms abandoned, and the few old folks left were far too poor to employ any kind of a doctor except in the most extreme cases.

"Good!" Seth puffed, gulping down the cool buttermilk. "Good!"

Such was his pride that he tried hard not to betray his stark hunger by wolfing down the corn cake as his need demanded, but his old hands trembled with eagerness.

"I was kinda faint," he confessed.

"It's a hard road up here," the girl remarked with understanding, "especially on a hot day."

"It seems to get steeper an' rougher—they don't half work it any more."

It was Seth who had changed, not the road. She noted the starveling thinness of him, his spindling shanks, his old body shrunk beneath the worn and threadbare clothes, so she hurried into the kitchen and brought out a dish of meat to set before him.

"We had more than we wanted," the girl explained.

She was in her middle twenties, dark, high colored, intensely alive, as strong as any boy. Yet this did not destroy a certain grace, the curving woman's figure of her, the wild charm that was a heritage of the forested hills.

And in her boy's clothes, against the homely background of this simple mountain home, she was beautiful. She blew her warm breath through the shiny barrel of the gun and wiped it out with a rag twisted on the end of the ramrod.

"Who's on the sick list to-day?" she asked, merely to amuse the old man.

"Why," Seth answered sadly, "there don't seem to be no sick folks no more."

"Our health is our fortune," she laughed.

"I never see so many empty houses in all my life."

"You'll see more each year," she said.

"An' nobody's at all curious about th' future these days."

"Our future," she sighed, "is only some more of the same!"

The girl's mother came out and spoke to the old man. She was a stout, elderly woman with a friendly smile and simple, natural manners, after the way of hard-working country folk.

"How's your cough to-day?" Seth asked.

"Better, since th' weather changed."

"An' did Ambrose's foot get right?"

"All healed up nicely. Worked in th' woods all his life, an' then to go an' cut his foot at his age!"

From father to son this little farm had come down to Ambrose Felter, each generation a bit poorer, a little less self-supporting. The thin soil was soon exhausted, the rains washed it away bit by bit, and it became necessary to sell off the timber, to cut cordwood, to hunt and trap all the wild creatures that gave food or fur that the humans might live.

"I've et a lot o' wild meat in my day," Seth said as the plate was cleaned, "but never nothin' like this."

"It's pheasant," the girl explained. "A new game bird introduced by those city sports for their private shooting."

"I don't see no game no more," he remarked sadly. "I can remember when—"

"There isn't much left for any one to hunt any more," she interrupted, not without bitterness, "and what there is has all gone over to those big preserves as though they knew those city amateurs couldn't shoot."

"I've heard," Seth grinned, "that guns can be fired over there same as any other place."

"So have I!" she laughed.

"Up Greenbush way them hired gamekeepers are makin' it mighty hot fer any one caught on posted land."

"The idea—strangers coming in here telling us where we can hunt!"

The girl voiced the sentiment of all the hill people who resent any restriction upon their natural hunting rights. Posted land cuts deeply into their meager living.

"Well," Seth said, "I've got to be goin'. Don't know how I'm ever to pay you fer this, you're always so well an' healthy."

"Oh, you can tell my fortune," she laughed, just to make the old man think he was paying. "We haven't much, but you're always welcome to what there is whenever you pass the house."

Seth took her small palm to read her future. Others would have seen nothing more than the firm, strong hand of an active young woman, with callouses from hard work in house and field.

But the old man was a professional fortune teller, and, therefore, not concerned with past or present, dipping recklessly into the future. And, like all such, he saw

nothing in the girl's palm but rosy promise, with just enough threatening trouble to make to-morrow interesting.

"You'll live a long time," he announced.

"Not unless we have better crops or move," she laughed. "I can't always hunt for a living and dodge gamekeepers."

"I see a man—two men."

"Good!" she exclaimed. "Men are mighty scarce up here."

"An' trouble comin'."

"Probably for shooting royal game in the king's private forest!"

"But your man," Seth went on, true to the ancient formula, "he will come."

"Ah!" she sighed, in mock seriousness.

"In a high powered car?"

"Walkin'," Seth corrected.

"A cheap guy," she sniffed. "I had hoped for better."

"One of these two men is bad."

"Ha, ha! So this little country girl's romance is to have a villain after all!"

"One will want you an' one will love you."

"How shall I know which?" she demanded.

"That," said Seth, who knew when to stop, "I cannot see!"

"And now," she retorted gently, "I shall read your future a bit. You are going to have a nice supper to-night!"

She put into his trembling old hands a newspaper bundle containing cold meat and yellow corn bread.

III

THE cattle buyer came rattling down the Whilton Hollow road in his sagging, mud spattered buckboard.

A big, heavy, blond man was Orrin Tate, a yellow mustache sweeping across his round ruddy cheeks, his full red lips holding a half smoked cigar. The swaying wagon tilted under the weight of him on the driver's side.

Behind the seat was a rank bundle of sheep skins done up into a roll. A tired calf, partly tied in a burlap bag, was lashed to the iron work.

No other man knew this maze of back roads better, no one was more familiar with the precarious circumstances of every upland farmer who had anything to sell. Garrulous, rough of speech, ever booming with laughter, his broad jokes always questionable, Tate was a man of much natural shrewdness, if little education, and he had

acquired by careful buying and selling, a comfortable fortune for the country.

In his younger days he had been a great bully and something of a fighting man, and thus men still feared his brute strength as they stood in awe of his riches. And there were women, of his kind, strongly attracted by this big, laughing, joking, ruddy man, who flattered him with attention until Orrin fancied himself something of a beau.

But, of all the women he saw in his long ridings, only one held his steady attention, and he rode now to see Altie Felter at the little red house on the upland.

The cattle buyer pulled into the steep driveway of the mountain farm, and drove around to the back where Altie was washing out a tub of clothes.

"Hello!" she greeted him, always friendly to every one. "Did you bring along your laundry?"

"Mornin', little sweetheart," he responded, and his face burned red with the surge of life within him at sight of her. "If you ain't pretty 's a picture!"

"You should wait and see me to-night," she said haughtily, "in all my silks and jewels, ready for the grand ball!"

"You look good to me just as you be!" he declared as he swung down from the wagon and hurried toward her. "Sweet enough to kiss!"

Ever a high hand with women, he would have caught her in his big arms, but she flirted soapy water into his hot face and danced away behind the tub.

"Must be a lot o' stock up here I don't know anything about," Ambrose Felter remarked laughingly as he came out of the barn. "You're ridin' up this way so often."

"Mornin', Ambrose." Orrin resented this intrusion, but it could not be avoided. "I thought maybe that calf o' yourn 'd be big enough to veal by now."

"Big an' fat," Ambrose said. He was a bit flattered by this rich man's attention to his daughter. "Come an' look at him."

"How much you want for that calf?"

"All I can get," Ambrose laughed.

Ordinarily this would have been just as little as possible, for Orrin Tate drove the hardest of bargains, and his prices struck bottom whenever he knew, as he did now, the seller's dire need of ready money. But Orrin had a second iron in the fire now, and he wished to please Ambrose, and to impress upon this girl his generosity as well as the magnitude of his wealth.

"Veal's pretty low," he said; "no more 'n six or seven cents; but I happen to know where I can place this one to advantage, so I'll give you nine cents, live weight."

"Ten," Ambrose bargained.

"Done," Tate said, blinking his little eyes a bit; "but I won't break even on the deal."

"If you should lose a couple of dollars," Altie declared, teasingly, "it would break my heart!"

The bargain made, and Ambrose having weighed the calf, Tate reached into his coat pocket and brought out a shot bag heavy with clinking silver. There was enough in it to buy a dozen calves, but, even as the coins fell tinkling through his pudgy fingers, a more impressive idea came to the buyer.

"I may need this change," he said, replacing the bag in his pocket. "Don't suppose you'll object to soft money?"

"Any kind looks good to me these days," Ambrose replied truthfully.

From the inner pocket of his vest, Orrin brought out a long leather wallet fairly bulging with green and yellow bills—a great package of them. He began fingering them over—tens, twenties, fifties—watching Altie out of the corner of his eye, and finally selecting those necessary to pay for the calf.

The dark eyes of Ambrose Felter were fascinated by this display of wealth, more money than he had ever seen all at once in his life.

"You carry quite a bit o' cash," he said in awe.

"Oh, just a little." Tate was enjoying his hour. "It's gettin' a bit low just now, only seven or eight hundred. I pick up quite a bit o' stock this time o' th' year, an' I always pay spot cash."

"I should think you'd be scared to carry all that money in your clothes," Ambrose remarked.

"Ha, ha!" Tate boomed, swelling out his barrel of a chest. "I'd like to see th' man who could take it away from me!"

"A woman could do it," Altie laughed. "They have taken more from bigger men."

"A certain woman could share all my money," Tate retorted boldly, "if she liked me well enough."

Altie turned hurriedly to her tub and buried her round brown arms deep into the white suds. She did not glance his way again.

"We'll go an' look at that calf," Ambrose interposed to avoid an unpleasant moment.

Orrin followed meekly to the barn, but the awkward black and white veal animal was of little interest to him now, whether fat or thin, large or small. He had paid for it, on Ambrose's say-so as to weight, so now he merely glanced at it.

Before his little blue eyes was the lingering vision of Altie's youthful body.

"You'll stay to dinner?" Ambrose invited.

"I'd figgered on gettin' over to Ferriville by noon," Tate said, so as not to appear too anxious.

"You stay," Ambrose urged with a wink. "Altie's been exercisin' th' old gun!"

While the girl and her mother were hurriedly resetting the table, it being almost noon—a white cloth in place of the everyday red one; white sugar instead of brown—Tate sat with Ambrose on the kitchen porch. Orrin was a good visitor, although a bit of a braggart; but now his studied remarks to his host were meant for other ears.

"I bought a bunch o' stock from Lou Peterson yesterday," he announced, making sure that Altie could hear; "sixteen fine head, an' some new milkers among 'em. Lou had to have some tax money. I cleaned up a good hundred on th' deal."

"Them that has gets," Ambrose quoted with an envious sigh.

Tate hitched his chair around so he could steal a glance or two through the open door to the kitchen. He stroked his curling yellow mustaches and fancied himself a handsome as well as a rich suitor. He would finish this business up to-day; as well now as any other time.

"I shipped a big drove o' sheep last week—"

And so on Orrin Tate conversed, shrewdly, as he thought, paving the way to success, so that Altie, in particular, would know what a wonderful man he was. The men were interrupted by Mrs. Felter calling them to dinner.

"It's not much," she apologized, as women will; "but it's all we've got."

"I'm not one to pick over my food," Orrin chuckled. "What I like best to eat is victuals!"

Like most farm meals in the abundance of early fall, it was sufficient, if not luxurious, and all on the table at once, even

to the blueberry pie. A platter of steaming yellow corn, a bowl of mealy white potatoes, pickles, beets, apple sauce, a dish of cold pheasant.

"You ain't killin' turkey broilers?" Tate asked, horrified by such extravagance, as he tasted this delicate meat.

"Why, no," Altie flushed, as she explained, "that's wild meat."

"Finest I ever et," declared Orrin, who was a stout trencherman.

"We don't get much fresh meat this time o' th' year," Ambrose pointed out, "except what Altie hunts."

"I don't think it's quite a woman's place," Orrin said significantly, "to be prowlin' through th' woods with a gun."

"Oh, but that's just fun!" the girl exclaimed. "I like it."

"It won't be so funny," he said knowingly, "if th' game warden gets you or some o' them rich landowners slap a big fine on you fer trespass."

"They'll have to catch me first!" she laughed.

Exuberant, happy, dominant in her presence, Tate monopolized the conversation, bringing a store of neighborhood news. His loud laughter boomed through the house; his bright blue eyes ever sought the girl across the table. He was satisfied that his wooing went smoothly, if slowly, along the accepted course, and he never dreamed of failure.

It pleased Altie a bit to be thus noticed and sought after, but instinctively she was always on the defensive in his presence. There was something antagonistic to her in the domineering way he had of always getting, of taking, what he wanted of life. He belonged to a generation she had left behind, for Altie had been to the village school, and she read newspapers, magazines, and books whenever she could beg or borrow them.

"This high country's runnin' empty," Orrin declared with a purpose. "Young people oughtn't to stay here overnight."

"Most of them have gone," Altie said, "and they won't come back."

"Ambrose could make more money in a week workin' on th' State roads, or over in th' cement works, than he does up here in a month," Tate declared.

"We get along," Ambrose said, resenting this, "an' up here it's home."

"Maybe Altie 'll find a man some day," Tate chuckled, "who'll be able an' willin'

to look after you folks by an' by when you don't get along."

"I'm not looking for a man," Altie announced, hoping this would be hint enough.

"Then it's high time," the visitor asserted, "that you opened your pretty eyes!"

After the meal Tate lingered and craftily maneuvered until he was alone with Altie in the back yard where she was rinsing clothes. He was determined to settle his business at once.

"I guess you know, Altie," he began boldly, "why I've been a drivin' up this way so often."

"I could guess," she murmured, dreading this moment.

"You come to town with me an' you won't ever have to hunt your dinner with a gun."

"I couldn't leave my folks," the girl said evasively, sparing him the truth.

"Th' time comes when girls have to do for themselves," Tate said positively. "I'll look after your folks."

"No," she decided, a bit sadly, knowing that he was too illiberal for that; "I couldn't."

"You'll all starve up here; never have nothin'—worse every year. I've had my eye on you for a long time, Altie—you come with me and I'll take good care o' you."

"No," she repeated. "I'm sorry, but—"

"Why, damn it, girl," his voice raising as always before any opposition; "don't you realize what I'm offerin' you?"

"Yes," she replied quietly, "I know all that."

"I'm rich—"

"In money!"

"You marry me, one o' th' most prosperous men in th' country, an' I'll—"

Words failed her. She turned to run into the house, to the sanctuary of her mother's presence in the kitchen, but Tate shot out a great paw and dragged her back.

"Don't be a fool—" he began hoarsely.

"I'm trying not to be," Altie said, her temper mounting swiftly under his restraining hand.

"You marry me an' you won't ever have to worry 'bout to-morrow's meals."

"There are other worries."

"Money gives them all th' laugh," he boasted. "There isn't anything that money won't buy."

"It won't buy happiness."

"I've never seen much roarin' happiness where poverty's in th' house. You come with me—"

"No," she interrupted firmly.

"A woman's no," he remarked, unable to believe that this poor mountain girl was actually refusing him and his wealth. "You're tryin' to tease me—"

"No, no, no!" Altie exclaimed, resenting his peremptory way with her. "If you had all the money in the world I wouldn't marry you, ever!"

Her words, unexpected, unimagined, ringing with finality, were like the sting of whips to his pride, to be resented with explosive anger.

"Stay up here an' starve, then!" he roared as he shoved her roughly aside. "Another lean winter an' you'll be glad to have me help you!"

He strode angrily away, and then, from his wagon step, he flung back a final sentence. "I ain't givin' you up, understand? Whatever I want I always get, one way or another!"

IV

THE cattle buyer, angry and sullen, unused to defeat, struck the bay mare cruelly with the whip, again and again, in a brutal desire to ease his own pain by inflicting punishment upon another. But the faithful animal was used to blows.

It flinched beneath the whip that was raising ridges over its lean flanks, but never deviated from the steady, nimble footed trot that was its accustomed gait, uphill or down, except for the steepest pitches or the very rocky stretches.

"Wouldn't have me, heh!" he told himself over and over in his slow mind, which was seething like a caldron with rage and hurt. "Wouldn't marry me if I had all th' money in th' world, heh!"

The very words repeated mentally stung his pride like the venom of wasps; the blow to his vanity was almost more than he could bear. Such bitterness was unknown in his easy life where the bulk of him, his domineering manner, his giant's strength, and his money always procured the things he coveted or desired.

"Half starvin' every winter up here in this God-forsaken country," Tate muttered to himself, with curses; "an' I offered her a good home in town!"

He was a man of many passions, ruled by uncontrollable emotions and hurricanes

of temper, primitive, uncultured, bound to have his way, right or wrong, and now that this woman had refused him, she became all the more alluring and desirable. Born of his hot anger in this bitter mood, many questionable schemes occurred to him to attain his end.

"My time 'll come," he told himself. "It always does, an' then—"

The iron-shod wheels rattled over the loose stones in the road in a blur of whirling spokes; the mare was homeward bound. The swaying wagon, wherein Tate spent much of his life, soothed him; his tortured mind found surcease in busy plans.

There were ways, ingenious ones, not strange to him, to make Ambrose Felter even poorer than he was. He would bring that proud daughter to her knees!

But the man's injured feelings did not interfere with his cattle business, or with his ceaseless effort to pile up profits. This road home dipped down into the tiny valley of Trout Brook and to the little farm of Brock Kennedy. It had been a dry month, with pastures failing, and Brock might have a cow or two to sell.

Much to Tate's amusement, when he drove into the dooryard he found old Seth there, sitting on the edge of the porch. The herb man's open medicine box was before him, and he was trying to interest the womenfolk in his wares.

"Hello!" Orrin shouted. "Where's Brock?"

"Fixin' fence," answered Mrs. Kennedy, a tall, spare woman. "He'll be back soon."

"I'll wait," Orrin said, swinging down.

She pointed to a porch chair, but he shook his head.

"How?" Tate grinned, advancing toward Seth. "Heap big medicine man!"

Orrin's humor was always coarse, and not infrequently cruel, but he considered himself a ready wit and fun maker.

To that obvious gibe at his ancestry, old Seth made no answer, he was used to this; but his glittering eyes were strangely bright in his wrinkled brown face.

"I've got a wastin' sickness, doctor," Orrin chuckled, big and fat and bulky. "I'm fadin' away day by day, no appetite, can't sleep nights. Maybe you could give me somethin' to cure it."

"I've got somethin' here I'd like to give you," Seth replied pointedly.

"An' I've a big wart here on my hand I want talked off," Tate went on.

He sat down on the edge of the porch, his broad back against a convenient post, facing Seth, and raised one big foot to the floor, resting a mighty forearm on the up-thrust knee.

"That red yarn you gave me fer my neck, to prevent nosebleed, didn't do no good at all!" he declared in mock censure.

Cunningly he slid his ponderous foot forward, inch by inch, until the broad toe of his shoe was behind the edge of the open medicine chest before him.

"I ain't had my fortune told in a long time," Tate chuckled. "Fer all I know I may be goin' straight fer th' poorhouse."

"You can go to th' devil for all I care!" Seth cried, sure that this bully was deliberately spoiling his sale.

"I'll go an' find Brock instead."

Tate made as if to rise clumsily, hoisting his bulk upright, and as he did so his foot struck against the box and knocked it from the porch, spilling its contents in a tumbled mass upon the ground.

"Gosh a'mighty!" Orrin roared in feigned astonishment, gulping down his laughter. "If I ain't th' awkwarddest!"

Old Seth knew that this was no accident. The treasured box had no sooner struck the ground than he was at the cattle man's throat, his clawlike fingers digging into the corded flesh of the bull neck.

"You would, would you!" Orrin growled, jerking him loose with one swift motion, and brushing the weak and helpless old man aside like some noxious insect. "I'll learn you to take a joke!"

A swinging blow of his open hand, smacking like a flat board striking water, sent old Seth staggering back, weak and dazed.

"Flyin' inter me like a mad tomcat over a little accident," Tate admonished him in mock severity. "If I've mixed up your old dope so your rheumatic patients get ear-ache oil, they'll probably live th' longer."

Roaring with laughter, he turned away to the barn, where Brock was driving in.

"Maybe you oughtn't have been so harsh with him," Brock cautioned.

"I'll slap him, or any other man, back into place whenever they fly into me!"

"There's Injun blood in him," Brock warned. "They say they never forget a friend or forgive an enemy."

"That crazy old fool 'll never get a chanst to do me any harm."

V

THESE rocky upland farms, tilted precariously against the blue, never wholly supported their owners. Always they had to augment a scanty living by working for others or by drawing heavily upon the bounty of generous nature.

Bark peeling, lumbering, hop-picking, the rifle, and the trap supported them. When all these, in turn, were gone, then the mountain farms began to be abandoned.

The younger people, educated away from such primitive living, went down to the villages and the near-by cities. They never came back to stay.

Only a few old people, a pitiful few, such as Ambrose Felter and his wife, with now and then a girl such as Altie, who must stay to look after them, remained upon these farms. The land held Ambrose, the irresistible spell of the mountains was upon him, was born in him, and, like the trees and rocks he loved, he could not be uprooted or moved.

Nor could his wife be brought to leave that humble homestead wherein her children had entered the world, and where two of them had gone on again. Every nook and corner of that house, of the grounds about, was associated with some loved vision of the past, of her children playing.

Each year, it seemed, as the muscles of Ambrose stiffened and his step became slower and slower, the farm gave less and less. Such game as there was left to hunt, such furs as could be caught, were a welcome asset to their living.

But now Altie had to do the hunting, as mountain women have done before, and no one was cleverer with snares and traps or a better shot with rifle or shotgun.

These mountain people cannot understand the game laws which forbid the killing of this and that, of restricted hunting seasons, nor can they quite comprehend the justice of these immense private preserves where they are forbidden to hunt at all. This was once their country, and they cannot be driven off by printed signs and hired gamekeepers.

Where the game was, there Altie hunted. Swift as a young doe in flight, stealthy as a hunting bobcat, the girl never had been caught at her poaching.

So, in the first gray of dawn, with the

night mists still writhing upward in the chill morning air, Altie, in rough khaki shirt and breeches, home knit woolen socks and rubber soled canvas shoes, went flitting like a gray ghost through the misty forest. A light, single-barreled shotgun was in her brown hands, and she was hunting on forbidden ground.

Of a race of hunters, she passed noiselessly through the wood, stealthy as a marauding fox. Leaves of yellow and scarlet fluttered earthward with every stirring of the dew damp forest air as day awakened.

Wraithlike gray squirrels ran swishing through the tree tops above her—the *thump-thump* of acorns dropping down betraying them. She paid no attention to these tiny gray beasts of the trees, nor to the little red-brown cottontails that raced away, *clump-clump-clump*.

The girl was awaiting the thunder of pounding wings when a startled grouse should flush before her. Only that native game bird or a big ring-neck pheasant, or a shot at a deer, would tempt her to betray her unlawful presence there with the booming roar of her gun.

And nowhere were gamekeepers more active than on this estate of Valhalla, whose owner, a city man named Campton, held most precious the princely sport of grouse shooting. His two gamekeepers were instructed to protect these birds at all times, and to keep poachers out of the cover.

Altie knew the ways of grouse. They prefer the thickets to open forest, and love the brush grown fences and the briery edges of the wood, where natural food is most abundant, and the very thickness of the cover offers them protection from natural enemies.

She came down along the inside edge of an old clearing where thorn apples grew in rank profusion, reddening the earth with their ripe fruit. Her gun was at full cock.

A racing rattle sounded in the leaves below her, a shrill bird voice crying "*Peet-peat-peat!*" and a young cock grouse raised in roaring flight, towering straight up above the thicket, then rocketing away over the low tree tops up the hill.

But the gun swung in relentless precision to the flight, and the stillness of the forest dawn was shattered like a great glass globe as the girl's shoulder jumped back with the recoil. The bird came whirling down to strike noisily upon the yellow-red carpet beneath the trees.

But when Altie reloaded and hurried over there she found nothing but a few loose feathers to mark the spot where the grouse had struck the ground.

She knew that the gamekeepers were watching these birds. She more than suspected that they were prowling somewhere through the woods a mile back where she had fired her first shot this dawn. And the report of her gun would soon bring them here, but she hated to leave a wounded bird to suffer.

Never having hunted with a dog, or depended upon one to find wounded game, she was an adept at discovering the quarry's hiding place. But this crafty winged cock was no stupid hen to crawl into the nearest brush pile. He ran racing through the thickest growth and buried himself in the leaves that had collected in a little hollow.

Altie tracked him for quite a distance, here and there a barred gray feather assisting her. She searched underneath every old log and brush pile, every upturned root, until she knew that it was unsafe to remain there another minute. Then, as she straightened up to hurry away, she was frozen motionless in her tracks by a strange voice behind her.

"Good morning, Diana!"

It was a friendly voice, but it stopped the very throb of her heart. She held her body tense for a long quarter minute, then she found strength to turn slowly in guilt and fear. With gasping relief she saw that, instead of a threatening gamekeeper, that greeting came from a fellow hunter.

Here was a smiling, comradely man face beneath a worn hunting cap, peering down at her from above the yellow hazel brush—a lean, handsome, youthful face, with glistening white teeth and amused eyes.

"Oh!" she gasped. "How you startled me!"

"Sorry," he said. "I was afraid if I didn't let you know that I was here you might shoot this way if another bird happened to get up."

"I was looking for a wounded bird," she explained. "He dropped right in here somewhere, but I can't find him." She was anxious to get away. "Guess I'll have to give it up."

"Mungo will find it for you."

It was then she saw that this hunter was accompanied by a splendid black-and-white dog of a kind she never had seen before.

He was a beautiful, silky haired animal, his face evenly marked, his black nose quivering with the scent of game.

"Dead bird," his master commanded. "Go find it."

The dog circled eagerly, head high, coming up into the faint stir of the morning air, then his nose dropped to the dew wet leaves and he went snuffling and nose rattling along on the trail of the wounded grouse. In a few seconds he picked up the live bird very gently and came trotting proudly back.

"Good dog," the master praised, killing the bird with a pinch at the base of the skull. "Here," handing it to Altie, "with Mungo's compliments, and mine."

"You keep it," she said. "I never would have found it without your dog."

"Wounded game belongs to the one that shoots it first," he pointed out; "such is the law of the hunt."

She smiled a bit nervously, but there was no time to argue, so she reached out and took the bird. Then her quick ears caught the faintest sound of a snapping twig, an almost inaudible stirring of the leaves below them.

"Sh-h-h!" she whispered. "Listen!"

Up the slope toward them came a bounding rabbit, and a grouse flushed below them somewhere.

"Quick!" she cried. "Some one is coming!"

"You aren't ashamed to be seen with me?" he laughed.

"This is posted ground, private property," she explained. "We haven't any right to hunt here."

"Oh!" he said. "Are you sure?"

"It's the gamekeepers—we'll be arrested if we stay!"

"That wouldn't be nice."

"Quick! Follow me—quietly."

She leaped away like a frightened deer. He was strong, and much of a woodsman, but he was hard put to follow the girl hurrying up the steep places before him.

She jumped from rock to rock, noiselessly, hurling her slender body up the height and over an intervening ridge, where she halted just long enough to beckon him down an old log road. Here, with easier going, he caught up.

There was a maze of these old roads, of deer trails, but she knew them all intimately. They were two miles away before she stopped, her breath hardly fluttering.

"There," she said. "I guess they won't find us now."

"You need never worry about their catching you," he panted.

"They've tried it lots of times," she smiled.

VI

HE leaned his double-barreled gun, an expensive but well worn weapon, carefully against the paper white bole of a tall birch. He took off his heavy canvas hunting jacket and laid it on the ground. He was a man who prided himself upon his physical training, but now his heart raced and the sweat poured from him.

"I'm dressed a bit too heavy for a cross country run," he confessed ruefully.

"We'll rest a minute here," she said, fondling the dog, "and then I'll take you off this dangerous ground."

"I'm soft yet," he admitted, a bit chagrined to be thus bested by a woman, "and I always get fooled by these cold fall mornings and put on too many clothes."

"The days are warm yet," she agreed, "when the sun gets up a bit."

"It's not the sun, it's the run," he pointed out frankly. "You ran me to a standstill."

She studied him carefully, although a bit shyly, there having been few men in her life. She noted that he was not over tall, yet strongly made, a man who evidently took some pride in his physical welfare, but there was no evidence about him of continued outdoor life or hard manual work.

She judged him rightly to be from the city, and she knew that the woods were full of amateur gunners every fall since the days of automobiles. His hair, as he tossed off his hunting cap, was thick and rumpled, darkened with perspiration, and of a light brown. His eyes were large and deep gray, and given to smiling wrinkles at the corners.

He might be, she thought, about thirty years old. In fact, he was seven years older than that.

"I don't suppose," he said, "that you bother with a gun when hunting rabbits, but run them right down!"

"You need legs to hunt on posted ground," she laughed. "Under the new trespass law it's fifty dollars' fine even to be caught on the land."

"Are we still in the same county?"

"Oh, we didn't run over a mile or two,"

she explained. "And the man who owns this private hunting has been trying hard to catch me."

"He'd better use traps!"

"He has been buying up land here for years, cut over land and abandoned farms, turning it into a large game preserve for his greedy self."

"The old pig!"

"Threatening us with jail and heavy fines if we step foot on his old place."

"The despot!"

"I understand that he seldom comes up here himself, but he hires men to look after it, especially during the hunting season."

"Serves the haughty lordling right to shoot his old game."

"But it's risky business," she warned.

"You better not try it again."

"I love risk," he said. "I am directly descended from Robin Hood."

"You don't know the man who owns the land—a Mr. Campton."

"Do you?" he asked whimsically.

"I never have seen him," she replied, "and I certainly don't want to, not with one of his birds in my pocket and my two feet on his private property."

"Of course," the hunter remarked, stuffing his pipe; "we must acknowledge that he is within his rights. The days for open shooting are about over in this part of the country. All the best of it is being bought up by sporting clubs or private individuals and closed to the public. If this wasn't done, the hordes of automobile hunters would soon clean up every wild thing and burn up the woods."

"It's not fair to us."

"Possibly not," he admitted, studying her. "Doubtless this fellow Campton means well enough."

"We have always depended upon the wild game for part of our living."

"You live up here, then?"

"Back yonder," she replied vaguely, with a wave of her hand.

The pipe going, he slipped on his coat and picked up his gun.

"Now that we have left those prowling gamekeepers miles and miles behind, we will continue our hunt."

"No," she objected, "I must hurry home."

"Mungo," he said to the anxious dog, "you ask her."

The setter came to her and nudged her

hand, and then he barked for the guns to come on.

"Perhaps you had better keep along with me a ways," she said. "You might get turned around here."

"I am a lost man without you!"

"And we might as well hunt back," she conceded, weakening.

"Better," he said. "Come on."

"You keep along this ridge," she bade, taking the lead, "and I will take the upper side."

"No," he said, "you walk along with me, and let Mungo find the birds."

He had to explain to her that hunting birds with a dog is vastly different from walking them up, describing how the dog hunted, locating the birds by body scent, and pointing until the hunters came up.

In a few minutes the girl forgot her shyness and restraint in the presence of this good-natured and friendly stranger. Their liking for the sport, for all outdoors, drew them together.

They had walked, really visiting each other as they went slowly along, perhaps a half mile before Mungo, quartering the ground ahead, drew up on a small covey of grouse hiding in a cedar thicket.

"Oh, look!" Altie cried in admiration.

"Birds," he explained eagerly. "Steady boy!" he called to the dog.

They hurried up, guns ready, and at command the well-trained animal stepped in and flushed four birds. They all raised to the hunters' disadvantage, booming away up the hill close to the ground and behind the cover, but the girl dropped one as her companion missed with both barrels.

"Good shot," he said in praise, "and two horrible misses for Marco the hunter!"

"You are a snap shot," she admonished; "no wonder you miss. You don't take time enough."

"And you are a land surveyor—the way you measure distance!" he retorted, as Mungo brought in the dead bird.

"Take that grouse to its rightful owner—flatterer!" he told his dog.

They followed up the remaining birds to where they had dropped into thick hemlock cover against a steep side hill, and the dog found them one by one. Here the girl killed a second bird on a hard left quarter, and her companion wasted four shells.

"Didn't any one ever show you how to shoot?" she jeered.

"I'm being shown to-day!" he grinned.

"You don't even know how to hold a gun!" She took his double-barrel and demonstrated. "You keep your left hand too near the breech—out with it, as far as you can. You shut one eye and squint the other when you aim—learn to shoot with both eyes open."

"I'm getting them opened!" he laughed.

He was so friendly and companionable, although a rank amateur at wing shooting, that she really tried to help him. And when, in the excitement of whirring wings pounding the air before him, he forgot her instructions, she scolded him soundly and showed him all over again.

"I can see now," he said, "that I am going to need a lot of lessons. You will have to hunt with me again to-morrow."

"A little practice and steadying down is all you need."

"But I'll never shoot like you."

"You would," she smiled, "if ammunition was precious and you hunted to live instead of for sport."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, as though he had unintentionally hurt her. "I am sorry!"

As they hunted along, she chose their route, changing direction every time a shot was fired, until they came to the settlement road, a public highway, and were safe from any gamekeeper.

"This road," she explained, "will take you straight down to the village."

"I am sorry our hunt is over," he said truthfully. "I have enjoyed it, even though your shooting has humbled me in the leaves at your feet. But I have a few days up here, and a cheap little car parked somewhere in these hills, and if you will hunt with me again to-morrow I shall try hard to learn how you do it."

"No," she objected. "I always hunt alone, it is safer."

"But not nearly so much fun. Watching a good dog work is half the pleasure of bird hunting."

"It makes it a lot easier," she admitted.

"So to-morrow—"

"Don't you come back up here again," she cautioned. "They'd catch you as easy as easy. You're too slow on your feet and make too much noise."

"Those gamekeepers won't ever bother me."

"Oh, they won't!" she remarked in derision.

"No," he laughed softly, "because, you

see, I am the owner of this happy hunting ground."

"You!" she gasped in her surprise.

"I am Craig Campton," he revealed in all friendliness, "and to-morrow we will—"

Her breath caught in her throat and made her wordless; her eyes were wide with fear. She whirled about and vaulted the low stone fence, and went racing away through a brush grown upland pasture toward her home.

VII

THE cattle buyer came again and again.

Whenever his business brought him into that part of the county he drove out of his way to see Altie. He was humble and patient now, biding his hour. Persistence had won him a fortune, a place in his little world, and he was confident that, sooner or later, the girl would be his.

Orrin Tate had the foresight to see that the time was fast approaching, unless something unforeseen and unlikely happened, when this upland farm no longer would support the family. Then hunger, want, love for her parents and thought of their comfort, would drive her to his arms.

Other suitors she had none; there were no young men in the hills, and the valley youths always neglected these poor farmer girls. Already Ambrose Felter looked with favor on Orrin's suit, deeming it a secure and prosperous match, and being himself fearful of his future.

Tate was there that day, waiting on the kitchen porch for dinner, when Altie came racing home. She was frightened, subdued, but she did not tell her parents of this strange adventure lest they would be worried.

She had hardly a word for the cattle buyer, actually avoiding him. All through that dinner, while nibbling at her food, her ears were alert for an officer to come driving up with a warrant in his hand.

She was guilty—caught at last—trespass—fines they could not pay. But worse than all this was the shame she felt to be caught by the owner himself, and to think that she had actually scolded him and bragged about her hunting there.

"What's the matter, Altie?" Tate asked.

"Nothing," she replied as she hurried away from the table. "I just don't feel right."

When he rode away that afternoon he knew that unless fortune favored him in

some unexpected way his suit was lost. She had no eyes for him, no thought of him. For the first time she had left him sitting there, hour after hour, alone.

"She's found another man," he told himself in sullen anger, ripe for any desperate act. "She's been meetin' somebody up there in th' woods."

The next day came, and as Sheriff Dirck Ackerman did not arrive to arrest her, Altie breathed a bit easier. Then, instead of fear and worry, she had many pleasant memories of that unusual hunt, the friendly smile that lived in the corners of the city man's gray eyes, his whimsical ways and gentle speech. And, as youth will, there were daydreams and vain imaginings—but she did not hunt again.

It was the month of blueberries, and the wind swept mountain tops were covered with the low bushes heavy with fruit. After the morning milking on the second day, Altie took one of the largest pails and went berrying alone.

Never, it seemed to her, had these berries been so large and plentiful. Her nimble fingers kept them rattling in a blue shower into her pail. And as she worked she thought of Craig Campton, wondering what he meant to do about her poaching.

From an angle of the old dug road, where it swings around the shoulder of West Mountain, the cattle buyer looked down on a cut over lot and saw Altie Felter picking blueberries. Her eyes were upon the ground, and Tate knew that she had not seen him.

He pulled up quickly and drove the mare out of sight into the woods beside the road, where he left her to nibble at the leaves.

At sight of the girl, alone and unsuspecting, a malignant devil took possession of the man.

"Take 'em where you find 'em," he said greedily to himself. "I've got her now where I want her—she's mine from now on!"

Like a hunting bear, he dropped down through the wood with very little noise for one so big and heavy. The bright yellow leaves of young basswood along the edge of the wood screened him; he kept underneath some young pines where the brown needles muffled his footsteps; a noisy spring brook tinkling down the hill near the girl drowned any little noise he made.

Hands and mind both busy, Altie did

not see him, never dreaming of his presence there.

She smiled a little to remember how she always had pictured the manor lord as a tall, bearded aristocrat, cold and austere, only to find him delightfully human after all, very like herself, and not even a good shot!

A twig snapped—a stone came rattling down. She was on her feet instantly, hoping it was Craig Campton, her dream come true.

"Well, well!" Orrin exclaimed as he stepped out. "If it ain't Altie!"

"What are you doing up here?" she demanded, a bit alarmed, hesitating whether to run or to stand her ground, but ashamed to show fear before this man.

"I'm lookin' for a lost heifer," he lied, and she read the truth in his glittering, narrowed eyes; "but mighty glad to find you up here."

"I was just going—I only wanted enough berries for a pie or two. I'll ride back with you," she said calmly, bravely as she could. "I'll have to hurry."

"No!" He stepped eagerly forward. "Not yet!"

He reached out and seized her by the arm.

"Orrin Tate, you leave me alone!" she cried, never having imagined the man would dare to lay hands on her.

The bushes screened them, they were far from any house, from any interference, and there was small chance that any one would travel that steep mountain road again that day.

"I told you I wouldn't give you up," Tate declared hoarsely. "I'll make you beg me to marry you!"

She fought him as a strong youth fights, supple, well muscled; spurred on by her dreadful fear and fierce anger. But, in the great arms of the man towering above her, bulking huge and all powerful, she was all but helpless.

"You let me go—you leave me alone!" she screamed. "If you don't, I'll kill you if I have to wait a year!"

"You'll be beggin' on your knees—"

He bent her strong body backward.

Behind them, unknown to either, came old Seth, hurrying down a deer trail. He had been attracted by Altie's raised voice.

Seth traveled a great deal through the forest where there was a chance of finding such small game as he could knock over

with his pebbles. But this day he had found nothing, not even a migrating robin, and he was hungry and desperate.

In puzzled curiosity he peered out from behind some low pines upon the struggling pair not thirty feet away. A second or two passed before he realized that Altie was in danger, and then he hesitated, because he knew how weak and helpless he was to help her.

He was only a feeble old man, unarmed, and one swinging blow of Tate's heavy fist, the weight of which he had so recently felt, would stretch him senseless, perhaps dead, upon the ground. But the memory of that very blow inspired him with new courage and the impulse not to neglect this chance for revenge.

Altie Felter cried out in a choking voice:

"You dare—"

Seth's right hand shot into his coat pocket, where eager fingers chose the largest pebble there.

"Now I've got you," Tate growled, his tentacle arms about her.

He bent his bull head to kiss her, but Altie wrenched one arm free and struck him full upon the lips. At the same instant Seth's old arm flashed, and the little round stone flew true to its mark, crashing against the cattle buyer's skull just behind the right ear.

Like a great tree blasted with lightning, he came crashing down, slowly at first, his heavy arms dropping from her lifelessly. He swayed at the knees and then plunged forward, face downward, in the dry grass and flat stones, where he lay twitching.

"I've killed him!" Altie cried in horror.

She turned and ran, as if from some evil thing, abandoning her pail of berries, and never looking back.

For a second or two, until she was out of sight racing across the hollow below, old Seth glared from his ambush, his dark eyes upon the quivering, unconscious body before him. Then he hitched off his medicine box and, crouching, stole hurriedly forth to bend above the stricken man.

His grimy fingers slipped into the capacious coat pocket and brought out the shot bag heavy with clinking silver; into the vest and removed the thick leather wallet stuffed with bills. Quickly he emptied this money into his own blood stained coat pockets and threw the empty bag and purse upon the ground. Then, like a shadow, like a wood gnome, he disappeared.

"A blow for a blow," he chuckled. "You pay dear fer that little joke!"

The cattle buyer began to writhe and thresh about as his scattered senses returned. He rolled over and braced himself to a sitting posture with his thick arms, shaking his dazed head in bewilderment.

"Altie!" he roared. "Altie!"

He did not fully realize just what had happened, but through glazed eyes he saw the girl running up the distant slope opposite him. Then his scattered brain images came into order—and he knew.

He heaved himself upright and braced the pillars of his thick legs to hold himself dizzily there while his fingers explored a wet and sticky spot behind his ear.

"Struck me with a rock!" he bawled indignantly.

Then his eyes, seeing clearer now, swept downward in search of her weapon, and he saw the empty shot bag and the flat purse at his feet.

"If she ain't robbed me, too!" he roared.

He searched the ground with anxious eyes, unable to believe that his money was gone, thinking it must be scattered there, but finding not a cent of it.

"Robbed!" he bellowed. "My pockets picked! I'll have her jailed!"

Then anger vanished before a more subtle scheme. He went hurrying back to his waiting rig.

VIII

ORRIN TATE had taken and given many good blows in his time.

No one ever before had toppled him from the mighty columns of his legs. And that a slender girl had done this with her naked fist was incredible.

"She had a rock hid in her hand," he declared to himself. "An' after she knocked me out she lifted my cash, but she can't get away with it—not with me!"

Muttering to himself, he climbed into his wagon.

"I've got her now right where I want her," he gloated. "Right under my thumb!"

He pulled the mare about and lashed her down the road to the Felter homestead.

"Where's Altie?" he demanded as soon as he wheeled into the yard.

"She's upstairs," the mother answered coldly.

Orrin wasted no time trying to explain his actions.

"You tell her I want to see her!" he ordered.

To get the full force behind Tate's scheme, it was necessary for both the father and the mother to know about the robbery. He could easily deny any serious intent in his accidental meeting with the girl.

"I guess, Tate, you've seen my girl for th' last time," Mrs. Felter announced sharply.

"Ha, ha!" Orrin boomed, sure he held the whip hand. "We've only just begun to get acquainted. I've only just begun to find her out!"

"You better get off this place before Ambrose comes."

"Th' sooner Ambrose comes th' better. You just fill these; put back what she took out o' 'em!" He displayed the empty bag and purse. "An' then I'll go about my business quick enough!"

"What—what—" The mother was confused beyond words. "You don't mean you've lost your money?"

"You go an' get that girl," Tate ordered. "An' let her explain how I lost it."

Altie, hearing this, came out, unafraid now in her own home. She was determined to settle with this man once and for all.

"What do you want with me?" she demanded.

"I want my money," Tate answered, "that's what I want."

"I haven't got your money," she said, puzzled.

"You can't put any smart tricks like that over on me; no, siree! You hit me with a rock, an' when I was down an' out you took my money; near a thousand dollars."

"What's all this about?" Ambrose demanded, driving in.

"This girl o' yours is a thief—"

"Hold on, now, Orrin!"

"I don't know what he is talking about," Altie said. "I never took his money."

"I've played fair with you," Tate reproached Altie, "an' what do I get—a crack on th' head an' my pockets picked, that's what!"

The four of them, all excited, were talking at once, the father and mother only partly understanding, but in the end Tate had the final word.

"I give you your choice," he threatened; "either that girl marries me, as I want her to—in which case he would get his money back, if she had taken it, anyway—or

"I'll go right down to th' village and swear out a warrant fer highway robbery."

"Go right ahead," Altie said scornfully.

"You'll think different when you get a good taste o' what's comin' to you if you don't listen to reason—twenty years in prison."

"You can't scare me," Altie declared bravely, yet she was a bit fearful, for those with money are always a power in the land. "I didn't take your money."

"Th' hell you didn't!" Tate shouted, thoroughly angry now. "Then you didn't hit me on th' head with a rock either."

"No, I didn't do that either."

"Ha, ha!" he roared, with little mirth. "You can tell that to th' sheriff when he comes up after you."

As his wagon whirled out of the yard, he flung back a final sentence:

"Remember, I gave you your choice!"

Altie pretended not to have heard.

IX

THOSE who have money will usually have their way.

Orrin Tate, a coward himself at heart, felt sure that arrest and a taste of the county jail would be sufficient to drive the girl into his arms when she was threatened with a trial and a long term in prison. He drove straightway to the village and swore out a warrant for her arrest.

This was placed immediately in the hands of Sheriff Dirck Ackerman for execution. Dirck read the warrant slowly, pondered the plain statement of fact therein, and sought Tate.

"Orrin," he began, "you don't really think Altie robbed you?"

"I know she did!" Tate replied in a loud voice to carry conviction. "I was all alone with her when it happened." He gave just enough of the story to establish her guilt.

"How did you happen to be up in Mullin's clearin'?" the sheriff inquired.

"That's fer me to know an' fer you to find out," the cattle buyer retorted in a tone of voice meant to convey a false meaning.

"I guess maybe I can find out," Ackerman said calmly.

"You know that I've been runnin' up there to see Altie fer more'n a year."

"I'll go up and have a talk with her."

"Go ahead," Tate sneered; "an' don't forget you've got a paper in your pocket

that authorizes you to bring her down here an' lock her up."

"Not necessarily to lock her up," the sheriff pointed out.

"I'd like to know who'd ever bail her out until court sets?" Orrin remarked confidently.

Altie told Dirck Ackerman the whole story, making as light of it as she could, hating to admit the seriousness of their struggle.

"I struck him in the face with my fist."

"He has been struck in the face before this, Altie, and with harder fists."

"And he fell face downward on the ground just as though he was dead."

"You knew he carried this money?"

"Oh, every one knew that, sheriff; he was a man to boast."

"You didn't see any one else up there?"

"I had been there alone for a couple of hours. I didn't see or hear any one until he came. And he couldn't have lain there on the ground more than a minute or two, for I was hardly down to the brook before I heard him roaring."

"The man was certainly robbed," Ackerman said; "but I don't think you took his money."

"I wouldn't touch anything of his with the fire tongs," she declared with feeling.

"Tate is sure you did it. I'll have to ask you to go along with me."

"Not to jail!" she exclaimed in horror.

"No," he said gently; "down to my office until this is straightened out. It's bad business, Altie, and I don't understand why Tate should do this."

"He wants to make me marry him, that's why," she explained. "He gave me my choice."

"Your choice of what?"

"To be his wife or go to jail."

"Ha!" Ackerman exclaimed, struck with an idea. "You don't think, Altie, that he wants you badly enough to throw away a thousand dollars?"

"No," she answered. "He was always too stingy for that."

"He might have hid it," Dirck suggested.

"No," she said. "I believe the money is gone."

X

A HIGH-SPIRITED girl's anger and indignation gave way to fear when Altie Felter

stepped into Sheriff Ackerman's little car. There came before her eyes an old print she had often seen in a school history, of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, riding to her execution in a cart, and a gaping crowd looking on.

"You ain't goin' to lock up my girl?" Ambrose demanded.

"Not if we can help it," Dirck replied, "and I guess we can. Get in, Ambrose, and we'll go down to the village and get this thing straightened out."

But even the sheriff did not know then the difficulties barring their way, or the grim determination of the cattle buyer to make this girl marry him. And, to give the devil his due, Orrin Tate really thought she had taken his money. He knew how desperate, how poor, they were.

He was confident that if Altie was held for the grand jury and locked up in the county jail, she would be humbled and willing to pay any price for freedom. She had her choice! Then he could bail her out and drop the charges—and they would live in the other end of the county.

It is the order of procedure in this particular county, where there is no police court and no regular police force, that all criminal cases shall be taken before a justice of the peace for a preliminary hearing, and then, if he deems the evidence sufficient, the prisoner is held for the grand jury, either in the county jail or released upon bail. Tate knew all this, and while Sheriff Ackerman was on his way to serve the warrant, he circulated freely about the village and dropped a few cautious words here and there where they would do the most good.

The justice, Zed Boughton, owned a hilly farm where he summered young stock, and he hoped for a good price from the cattle buyer. He certainly would do nothing that might offend Tate.

Soon the story of the robbery was flying on the wings of gossip through the township, and Tate, with his acquaintance and money, made sure that no one would bail the girl out but himself when the time came.

The hearing itself, in the rear of Zed Boughton's store, was a simple procedure as soon as the sheriff arrived with Ambrose and his daughter.

Altie was thankful when Tate suggested that the door to this back room be closed and locked to shut out the curious crowd,

for the valley folk are naturally antagonistic to those of the heights.

She sat close to Dirck Ackerman, who was trusted by all these mountain folk, and she answered questions in a low, clear voice.

Tate brought in Will Granby, a farmer, to prove that he had this money in his pocket that morning. Granby swore that he had sold some stock to Tate, and saw both the bag of silver and the well-filled purse. Then the cattle buyer explained how he came to lose it.

"I had a date with her," he stated under oath, "up there in th' woods."

"It's a lie," Altie interrupted. "I never dreamed of your coming."

"An' when I tried to kiss her," Orrin grinned, "she pretended to fight back, and struggled enough to take my attention—"

"We fought," she corrected.

"Then she hit me on th' head with a rock," he added lamely, "an' when I come to, I discovered that my money was gone."

He swore to the amount of money missing—nearly a thousand dollars. There was no question but that the man had been robbed. No one, except Dirck Ackerman and Ambrose Felter, believed but that the girl had taken it. And Dirck was deeply puzzled to account for the theft.

Altie told her story simply, truthfully; but when she told of knocking this big, hulking creature to earth with her fist, of seeing him fall at her feet unconscious, every one but Ackerman and her father laughed. It really was absurd, and did more to discredit her story than any word from Tate.

"Struck me in th' face with her fist!" Tate boomed. "If she did, I never knew it—look at that lump!" He pointed to his close clipped head. "There's where she knocked me over with a rock."

"I never hit him with a stone," Altie began.

At this point the hearing was interrupted by a loud banging on the closed door. At first the justice ignored this interference, but finally the distraction was too much, and he jumped up and flung the door open.

"What do you mean," he demanded, as the door swung, "disturbin' this court?"

He stopped, speechless with amazement, facing the owner of Valhalla.

"I have a little special interest in this case," Campton said in a low pitched voice.

Zed bent in the middle and shot out a bony hand.

"I never dreamed it was you, Mr. Campton. Come right in an' listen to th' proceedin's."

The door screened them from those inside.

"How far have you gone with this case?" Campton demanded.

"Jest about finished. We're holdin' her for highway robbery. An' let me tell you, we've got one of th' worst poachers there is up there—mighty good thing for you if she's put away for a spell."

"That wouldn't be very neighborly," the city man remarked. "I live up there, too!"

Zed was one of those men who instinctively humble themselves before wealth, and he had been submissive to Tate only until a richer, more powerful man came along.

"Come right in," he boomed, shuffling aside. "Come right in an' we'll finish this up to your satisfaction."

At sight of Craig Campton, Altie gave a gasp and straightened up in her chair as if to run. She was bitterly ashamed that this man should see her there, arrested, accused of a serious crime.

And just as quickly a new fear seized her, and she hid her hot face in her brown hands, so she did not see his friendly smile. He had come, she thought, in this dark hour, to testify against her character, to press his charge against her for trespassing and poaching on his private lands; for stealing his game.

Tate and Zed were being counseled by a cheap little pettifogging lawyer who, at least, had legal knowledge sufficient to keep the procedure straight.

"Who represents the defendant here?" Campton asked.

"Why," Zed replied, "there didn't seem to be no need to bother—"

"Then I assume that responsibility," Campton remarked with sympathetic understanding. Altie suddenly found courage in the soft notes of his mellow voice. "It would seem that this hearing is a bit too one-sided and hasty to be entirely fair and without prejudice, therefore the defendant waives examination for the grand jury and asks that bail be fixed."

"We aimed to hold her anyway," Zed grinned.

"So I surmised," Campton smiled.

"An' we'd agreed to fix bail at one thousand dollars."

"Are you quite sure you have made it high enough?"

"High enough so there's no danger o' any one bailin' her out!"

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," Campton said.

He reached into an inner pocket, as if prepared for this very contingency—he had stopped at the bank on his way—and drew forth a sheaf of new bank notes. Slowly, methodically, he counted off a thousand dollars and pushed the money across the littered table.

"There," he said, "is checkmate to your black knight."

Altie, watching all this, did not understand this matter of bail. She thought he was paying Tate the money she was accused of stealing.

"No, no!" she cried, jumping up in protest. "I'll go to jail before any one pays him money I never took!"

"This is merely our pledge," Campton smilingly explained, "that we will appear before the grand jury next month. In the meantime we will find out where this fellow's money really went."

Orrin Tate sat there in dumb silence, seeing his scheme frustrated for the time being, unable to protest, and feeling, somehow, that all was not going well.

"And now," Campton addressed the girl, "if the court formalities are complete, I will take you back home."

She sprang for the door like an animal freed of a trap, and dashed out ahead of him, pushing her way through a crowd of men and boys filling the outer store.

"Take me away from here, quick!" she begged as soon as they were outside.

"Not quick in this old slow-but-sure machine," as he helped her into the little car, "but eventually."

Soon they were on their way out of town and into the hills.

"Why did you do this?" Altie demanded.

"Oh, he said, 'a lot of reasons—but first and lastly because I don't believe you took that money.'"

"But you do know that I am both a sneak and a thief!" she cried.

"That's news to me!"

"I sneaked on your posted land day after day and stole your birds."

"I never had a clear title to those birds."

"And I've killed your deer, too."

"The loss shall be borne bravely, as becomes a he-man, dry-eyed and smiling!"

"But I never took that money."

"Of course not," he said confidently. "I'm sorry."

"I don't want you to feel sorry for me," the girl asserted, her eyes wet; "I don't deserve it."

"And I am not so sure," he said very gently, "that my interest in you is entirely prompted by sympathy."

XI

FOR once old Seth was not hungry. For once he was without his old medicine chest.

He was on his way home with a bulging sack upon his back. He walked a bit faster than usual, with strength renewed, and he stood a bit straighter now, secure in new confidence for the future.

And, for once, there was no deadly pebble in his right hand to knock down the smaller birds and beasts that he might live.

In the bulging sack upon his back, heavy with good living, there was life—salt pork, corn meal, beans, tobacco. He had eaten his fill, and here was abundance for the immediate future.

But Seth was clever; all the inherent cunning of those few red drops coursing in his life stream guided him in this dangerous adventure. In his pockets were only a few pieces of old silver, a crumpled dollar bill or two, no more, for at any display of wealth on his part, he who never had any store of money, some one would suspect who had the cattle buyer's money.

Seth had hidden it all away in one of the deep fissures of the limestone ledge above the cold spring, where he could draw upon it little by little, for years and years, as long as he lived, with no fear of winter hunger, of famine years to come.

Nor had he at the time, shuffling up the worn mountain road, any regrets at all. He, starving, had taken only from the rich—from the man who took from his fellow-men with hard bargains differing but little from actual confiscation. He knew that this loss was not serious to Orrin Tate.

A number of gray squirrels, migrating from below where food was scarce, were stirring like puffs of soft smoke over the yellow leaves beneath the oaks where the bitter acorns lay, but Seth hurled no stones.

"I'm sick o' wild meat." He shuddered at the very thought. "I don't ever want

to see it again. I want johnnycake and fat pork gravy."

And so, once again, he came to the little red house at the crest of the road.

"But a nice glass o' buttermilk," he admitted to himself, "would taste good."

So he turned in and climbed the twisting pathway to the house, wondering if Altie was all right. Mrs. Felter, alone and anxious, came hurrying out to meet him.

"Have you been down to th' village, Seth?" she asked anxiously.

"Not since early this mornin'," he answered. "Where's Altie?"

"Why, Seth, ain't you heard?" the mother asked, eager to confide her misery and anxiety. "Altie's been arrested!"

"No!" Seth exclaimed. "Fer shootin' wild meat?"

"Orrin Tate says she stole his money."

"Ho!" Seth gasped. "Ho!"

She went on in a torrent of words to tell just what had happened, but the old man, fairly wilting down before her, heard nothing. His sack of provisions seemed suddenly to weigh him down, tons and tons, until his spare body shrank beneath it, and he sagged weak and sickly to the steps before him. Seth never had dreamed that Altie might be accused of this theft.

"Oh, God!" he groaned. "You don't mean to say they've come an' took Altie fer that?"

"Dirck Ackerman came an' took her down to town. Tate swore out a warrant."

His age swooped down upon Seth again, all the false stimulation of new life and future security vanished before this dreadful news. Altie arrested—gone—always so good and kind to him—fed him when he was hungry—and now arrested for the thing he had done in his hour of need.

"She never done it." Seth's voice was almost a whisper, forcing the hard words out. "Altie never done it—she was fightin' him—"

His tongue was arrested, his voice drowned, by the pulsing roar of two cars climbing the steep road through the woods below. The first of these was Craig Camp-ton, with Altie in the seat beside him, and right behind was Sheriff Ackerman with Ambrose.

Seth gasped, and caught himself in time. With Altie free there was no need making trouble for himself.

"Hello, doctor!" Altie was trying hard to be brave and cheerful for her parents'

sake. "You read my fortune right; the trouble you prophesied would come to me is here!"

Then every one seemed to be talking at once, and it was not clear to Seth just what had happened down in the village, but he gathered that Altie was only temporarily free, there was a trial to come, they had to find out where the money went.

"It's all very mysterious," Dirck said. "I'm going over there and have a look around. Certainly no one could take a dollar away from Tate while he could move a muscle, and there are mighty few men in this township who could knock the big brute off his feet even if they had a free swing at his jaw."

"I struck him like this"—Altie demonstrated the blow to the sheriff, how she had struck with the heel of her fist, being held too tightly for a full arm swing—"and he went down like a shot. I thought he was dead and I ran!"

"You didn't even hurt him!" Dirck remarked.

Old Seth sat there watching her, open mouthed, dazed by all this unexpectedness, speechless, stupefied by the horror of his own guilt inadvertently reflected upon the girl who was his friend.

"The blow that knocked him out was behind the right ear," Campton pointed out.

"But no one else was there to hit him," Altie said.

"Maybe he stumbled an' fell an' struck a rock," Ambrose suggested.

"Well," Altie laughed, "if we can't figure it out, maybe Seth here can help us. He certainly read my future right."

"Yes, yes!" Seth exclaimed eagerly. He saw a way to help her now. "I've found lots o' lost things."

In that brief interval he had made his decision, the choice of a comfortable living and a secure future, or hunger and cold, even prison, to help this girl who had befriended him. He was old, anyway; they couldn't shut him up for very long.

"I'm an old, old man," he said. "I see many visions."

He covered his eyes with his clawlike hands, his bent body rocked back and forth, his puckered lips began an ancient chant in words burned into a tribal memory, but meaningless to him. Then he stiffened and spoke in a shrill, unnatural voice:

"I see money, lots o' money—silver an'

paper money—it's in th' ground—no, it's stuffed into a hole in th' rocks—it's behind some stones an' moss—a hole in th' lime rock—it looks like the ledge back of th' cold spring—it is th' ledge."

He awoke as if from a trance, and stared all about him, a bit uncertain what to do next.

"Seth," Dirck demanded, "do you really think that money is over there?"

"My vision has gone," the old man replied vaguely.

He picked up the heavy sack, bending low beneath its weight, and went stumbling down the pathway to the road.

For a little time no one spoke, watching this ancient figure struggling on up the hill, older than ever now, fear dogging his heels.

"Seth did it," Dirck announced quietly. "He threw one of his pebbles."

"He was starving," Altie said. "Poor Seth!"

XII

SHERIFF DIRCK ACKERMAN found the money in an old tin can, hidden safely away in a deep crevice in the limestone cliff above the cold spring. It was all there but a few dollars. With this in his pocket he went up to see the old man.

"I was on my way home," Seth explained, "hungry, lookin' fer somethin' to eat. Then I heard Altie's voice, frightened like, an' I ran down to th' edge o' th' bresh an' saw her fightin' him. She always was so good to me!"

"Good to every one," Dirck nodded.

"She was fightin' him, helpless as a lamb in his great arms, an' me standin' there behind th' bushes too old an' weak an' helpless to do anything. Jest th' other day he slapped me down. I had to do something, quick—I threw a stone!"

"You did right, Seth."

"An' then, an' then," his voice shrank to a hoarse whisper, "Dirck, there ain't nothin' a man won't do when he's starvin'!"

"No," Dirck said, "there isn't. Love of life is the first law."

"I'm old, I be. My road grows steeper as it grows shorter, rougher an' crookeder near th' end. I want to die free in my mountains—but I'll go to jail gladly afore I'll see Altie suffer fer somethin' she never done. At least I won't be cold an' hungry there."

"You'll stay right here, Seth, as long

as you live," the sheriff promised, "and you won't be hungry, either. That man Campton, who owns so much land west of here, is a big lawyer down in New York. We had a long, serious talk with Tate last night. Orrin has agreed to forget all about this whole business, and if he doesn't, Campton will start an action against him for attempted assault, and we've got you for a witness. He'll be glad enough to get his money back and keep his mouth shut."

"You mean, Dirck, you ain't a goin' to arrest me?"

"Certainly I'm not," the sheriff replied. "In saving Altie you atoned for all the rest. And I am going back to town now and suggest to our church committee that, instead of sending money away for foreign relief, we better look after our own people first."

XIII

"I've found a place where there's a lot of birds!"

Craig Campton was all excitement as he leaped out of his hunting car and came running to the kitchen porch of the little red farmhouse.

"Get your gun, Altie, and come on!"

"No," she said, a bit sadly, "I have hung up the old fusee for good!"

She did not jump up and make a fuss over his coming, but moved along on the top step, where she was busy preparing small vegetables for pickling, to make room for him to sit down.

"You don't mean you aren't going to hunt any more?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Not on posted land!" she smiled.

"Oh," he said, "I've given you perpetual rights over there."

She shook her fine head negatively.

"Or, if you insist," he added, sitting down beside her, "we'll go over to the Wheeler preserve and fool the gamekeepers there."

"It was fun, just to see if you could do it and not get caught," she confessed, and smiled in memory; "but after you've been arrested once it rather loses its humor."

It was difficult for her to remember that this man was the owner of the great estate stretching for miles up the mountain before her, a successful metropolitan lawyer, as he sat there in his worn hunting clothes, refilling his pipe, in a thoughtful mood.

He looked no different from most young sportsmen who came up the heights occasionally from the valley below.

"You needn't worry about Tate any more," Campton said. "Dirck Ackerman found the money and gave it back to him. We had a talk with him last night, and he agreed to drop this action when I told him that we would start another, a more serious one, against him. He was badly frightened."

"You come to help me," she cried in shame, "and that's the way you pay me for the game I stole from you!"

"I am not quite so certain that all this wild game belongs to me as I was a few days ago."

"But the land does!"

"It would seem," he smiled, "that the more of this land a man owns the poorer he is. It is true that I have acquired a lot of scenery up here, a sort of a sentimental hobby of mine, but it will be years and years before I can bring it into timber and a comfortable income. In the meantime I must work, like other folks, keeping big corporations into the straight and narrow paths to dividends. I am rich only in beauty, good health, and a cheerful disposition! But I am rewarded for all my trouble and expense by the fun I get out of hunting and fishing, the outdoor life and intimacy with nature. That is my heritage, for I was born in a little red house, very much like this one, high up in the green hills to the west of here."

"I used to know a Hiram Campton over Doddsville way," Ambrose Felter remarked, coming out of the house in time to catch the drift of the conversation.

"He was my grandfather, and I spent my summers with him as long as he lived, but the acid factories came and destroyed the forests, so we moved away. Later I began to buy land up here; I hate to see the woods cut down and the wild things vanish."

"This," Ambrose said proudly, "is a good country."

"Beautiful," Altie sighed, her dark eyes upon the blue ranges half hid in the autumn haze.

"I may be land poor," Campton declared mockingly, knocking out his pipe; "but I'm mighty proud! If you scorn my company, Altie, I shall go up there all alone by myself and scare those birds half to death."

"I suppose," the girl laughed, "if you really want broiled grouse for supper I had better go along."

"I hit one once," Campton grinned. "I did, honestly!"

XIV

IN the excitement of that morning's hunt, with the whirring grouse rising before the dog, with booming guns and excited voices, Altie Felter forgot all her recent troubles, so quickly is care banished by youth.

She showed Campton, happy as a child, the secrets of the forest—how one can make the nocturnal flying squirrels come out by rapping on dead trees where they sleep in woodpecker holes—where a 'coon family lived in a big hollow hemlock.

She renewed his lessons in wing shooting until he knocked down a bird, although it was merely a straightaway shot down an old wood road.

In a little ravine of tumbled rock and bronze ferns, where a spring gushed forth, they stopped to eat a pocket luncheon he had provided, and to reenact, in excited speech, the tense moments of their hunt. Not until they had eaten did Campton speak of the things he had in mind.

"I am going to ask your father to take charge of my reforestation work," he began; "he is an old woodsman."

Altie knew what this meant to them—a steady income, no worry, security from want.

"I have stayed by them," she said, "though at times it hurt, knowing how they love the old place, but aware all the time it would be a losing struggle. But if dad had a good job like that I could go down to the city and get something to do."

"You wouldn't like it there."

"I'd make myself like it," she declared firmly. "I'd like it anywhere if it gave

me a chance to be somebody, an opportunity to do and to learn."

"I had something in mind for you also, Altie," he said.

"No," she replied, shaking her head, "you have done enough."

This city man, who always had been so ready with words and so keen with argument, now found himself suddenly confused and incoherent:

"A—a sort of partnership—up here—"

She stared at him, not comprehending.

"We could work and study, Altie, and play together—"

"Just what," she demanded, "are you trying to say?"

"Why—why," in a low and serious voice, "I'm asking you to like me a little, Altie."

"God keep me from liking you any more!" she cried, jumping up in blushing confusion.

"More and ever more!" he said happily, catching her in his arms.

"I'm nothing," she declared bitterly; "a tall, gawky hill woman—"

"The woman I have been looking for these many years," he interrupted gently. "A woman who knows how to live my kind of a life, comrade, partner, wife."

"No, no!" the girl protested, but finding no strength to struggle away from him. "I never had a chance. I'm not fit to be your office clerk."

"You shall have your chance."

"I don't belong in your world."

"I own a world of land up here."

"I'm only a poacher!"

But after a bit they went on through the forest of red and gold, side by side, arm in arm, the air heavy with the honey fragrance of spice wood. And the quartering dog before them looked back from every rising knoll, wondering why they lingered so.

THE END

ON FAR HILLS

ON far hills are roads I'd know,
The joy of all high places,
In little valleys, too, I'd go
And brave the moon's embraces.

Of far hills a dreamer am I,
Of winding roads a lover;
There's a world of them, before I die,
I still want to cover.

Charles Divine

Providence Plus

AN IMPROVIDENT TWO-LEGGED GRASSHOPPER DISCUSSES A
MOOT QUESTION OF PHILOSOPHICAL BEHAVIOR
WITH A FORESIGHTED HUMAN ANT

By Earl Wayland Bowman

LOCAL statisticians of Pahsimaroi Valley estimated that Silas Parker had his philosophy of life down to the point where he was able to calculate on exactly sixty-nine and seven-tenths chews of tobacco from a ten-cent plug.

The audience in Felix Wooster's general store in Maricola, the six hundred population, commercial center, and county seat of Los Prunita County, southern Arizona, on a certain Saturday afternoon was therefore in a manner prepared when, taking advantage of a lull in the conversation, Silas Parker, with ceremonial deliberation, cut off a fractional portion of a ten-cent plug and observed:

"My idea is that a man's head ain't put on him just to have a chiropractor twist it. It's to think with!"

Silas paused to give his remark a chance to sink in.

It sunk.

Admittedly the most "full-handed" and eligible bachelor rancher of Pahsimaroi Valley, it also was conceded that Silas Parker's words were entitled to weight.

Jeff Coombs squirmed around on his nail keg, looked up at Silas and grinned. Jeff was the one heretic who dared occasionally to dispute Silas's philosophy of preparedness. Silas saw the grin, and his next remark was addressed directly to Jeff.

"For instance," Silas grunted, "what in common sense does a man want with seven children on a homestead?"

It was a personal thrust; seven was the number of small Coombses that called Jeff "daddy." With tolerant good humor Jeff answered the challenge with another grin and a laughing:

"What good's a homestead *without* seven children?"

Silas flushed uncomfortably and frowned.

"Well, a man ought to think things out in advance," he muttered, "an' be prepared for emergencies—even to th' extent of bein' buried properly!"

"Why not leave something to Providence?" Jeff asked carelessly.

"Providence ain't always dependable," Silas retorted. "A man's got to add foresight to Providence, which makes it Providence plus. It's the only safe way."

"That's right," Felix Wooster approved, pitching a prune out of the sack he was weighing back into the bin. "A man needs to watch out ahead these days. Oil stocks is so blentiful. Not to mention widows!" Felix spoke with a slight accent and a strong hint of regretful memories.

At the mention of widows, the audience grinned, and Silas Parker flushed again. Silas's interest in the Widow McLean was as well known as his often reiterated philosophy.

"Well, that's my motto," Silas resumed, doggedly; "look before you jump, an' then—"

"Jump anyhow!" Jeff broke in with a laugh.

Silas glared.

Jeff Coombs was notorious for his reckless indifference to a probable rainy day. A wife, who seemed strangely happy, a team of white-eyed bronchos, a few cows, three unusually good hunting dogs, a partly improved quarter section homestead of foothill land a mile and a half from Silas Parker's model farm, the seven children mentioned before, and a happy-go-lucky disposition constituted Jeff Coombs's possessions.

Against these Silas Parker was Los Prunita County's most illustrious example of

"look-aheadedness." Silas knew it, and was proud of his reputation for preparedness; he sought to retain and enhance it.

Nor was Silas's fame wholly unjustified. He was a forty-year-old bachelor, sandy of complexion, substantially built, and substantial financially.

Silas owned the best three-hundred-acre ranch at the upper end of Pahsimaroi Valley, sundry horses, cattle, and other live stock, including Judas, a brindle tomcat. Moreover, Silas had one of the best coffins which money could buy in Tucson.

Naturally enough, Jeff Coombs's irresponsibility was a red rag to Silas Parker, yet far down in Silas's heart was an emptiness and almost an envy of Jeff's queer contentment. Sometimes the bachelor wondered if the married man was wise or only a darned fool.

"If a man contemplates an' makes his plans—" Silas began once more, glaring at Jeff.

"They'll probably all dissolve," Jeff interrupted again, impudently. "I've seen 'em do it too frequent. Look at Jim Bowler, for instance: Jim 'contemplated an' planned' around an' decided to get married so he'd have somebody to flip his flapjacks for him; after which he went over to Los Angeles and set around Pershing Square till he got acquainted with that Mazie woman an' married her. Then he brag her out to the ranch; pursuant to which that sewing machine agent come along an' Mazie ran off with him, an' consequently Jim's right back in the spot he started from. Now, there's a sample of plannin', an' the results of plannin' for you. Jim's still flippin' his own flapjacks."

"Jim didn't plan far enough," Silas snapped. "If he'd contemplated to the ultimate he wouldn't have married her, an' if he hadn't married her she wouldn't have run off. It's simple if a man's just got sense enough to figure it out."

II

SILAS spoke with feeling. Jeff's reference to Jim Bowler's experience was a stab.

It brought to Silas's mind his own not yet wholly abandoned plans regarding Hetty McLean, widow of Tom McLean, whose ranch was over Resurrection Ridge, a couple of miles from Silas's place. The widow was attractive matrimonially, despite her nine-year-old twins, Sally and Sam.

For three years, in fact ever since an explosion of dynamite, when they were building the high line canal, had come a trifle too quickly for Tom to dodge, and which resulted in Hetty becoming a widow, Silas had been contemplating and planning. Only a month before he had finally decided to take a chance.

"You want me to marry you, do you, Mr. Parker?" the widow countered when Silas told her he had figured it out and suggested matrimony. "Well, I'll admit that you've got some—a few—fairly good points, and with a certain amount of training you might be made into a kind of half-way useful husband, but"—and Hetty's blue eyes flashed—"you're too fond of coffins. I might be able to stand living with you personally, but I'll be hanged if I don't draw the line at dwelling in the same house with a coffin. You'll have to excuse me this time!"

Silas flushed uncomfortably and went away.

Now he wondered if Jeff Coombs had heard about Hetty's rejection of him because of his coffin, and was poking fun as a result of the incident.

Jeff's next remark was disarming.

"A man can reason his head off an' contemplate an' plan till he's black in the face," Coombs resumed, "an' in spite of all his plannin' the whole works is apt to just naturally evaporate or go up in smoke, so to speak."

"The future's got to be provided for—" Silas began.

"Providence 'll do it!" Jeff laughed, lighting a cigarette. "Yesterday *was*; tomorrow *ain't*; to-day *is*—an' that's plenty. Them's my emotions."

Silas snorted; such heresy was unbelievable.

"Lots of men might have been rich an' lived comfortable indefinite," Silas shot back; "but they have died, an' died poor, because of thoughts like them of yours. Even squirrels save up nuts for winter."

"I ain't noticed any rich man, no matter how comfortable he was, livin' forever," Jeff broke in again, while the crowd snickered at this verbal dual, inevitable when Silas and Jeff met. "And, as far as squirrels is concerned, more than one darn fool squirrel has worked himself to a frazzle droppin' nuts into a holler log in November, so he'd have a surplus to use in January, an' then been shot by some feller

with a twelve gauge shotgun or a twenty-two rifle in December. In which case, what in Sam Hill did his holler log full of nuts amount to?"

The audience roared; even old Felix chuckled at Jeff's ridiculous line of reasoning.

"You already ought to been a lawyer, Jeff!" Felix declared.

Jeff looked around with a quizzical grin; his eyes rested a moment on Mrs. Jeff, and the group of children at the front end of the store:

"Melissa says I'm ornery enough as it is!" he chuckled.

Silas gasped at the absurdity of Jeff's argument. However, he thought, it was just what one might expect from such a person as Jeff Coombs.

Here was a married idiot who never missed being present, with his entire family, at the circus which came each year in June to Maricola. Any man who would take his wife and seven children to a circus every year, besides squandering money in ruinous fashion on a picture show at least once a month, could hardly be expected to understand, much less accept, Silas Parker's rational economic conceptions.

As he mused on these things, Silas was almost glad his affair with Hetty McLean had been checked by her aversion to his burial idea. A warm glow suffused him when he thought of his coffin.

Silas felt a flush of pride in the distinction of being the only citizen of Los Prunita County farsighted enough to anticipate the future by having always ready his own coffin. It was unanswerable proof of the consistency of his arguments for preparedness.

"For the life of me," Silas spluttered condescendingly, "I can't see what some people live for."

"Neither can I!" Jeff chirped significantly.

"More than one man ain't been properly buried on account of lettin' Providence engineer his future," Silas sneered, gathering up his parcels and starting toward the door.

"Providence an' me's always been pretty good friends," Jeff replied lightly. "Anyhow, speakin' for myself, I'm a whole lot more interested in not bein' buried at all—or at least not till it's plumb necessary—than I am in bein' properly buried. Be-

in' buried in any kind of shape don't have the slightest fascination for me, an' I ain't worryin' about where, when or how I'm buried."

Silas paused at the door to fling back a prophecy.

"The time will come, Jeff Coombs, when you'll wish to Gawd you'd made arrangements to be properly buried!"

With that parting shot, Silas stalked out to the hitchrack, climbed into his buckboard and headed his team through the warm late April sunshine toward the upper end of Pahsimaroi Valley.

Jeff glanced across at the sweet faced, dark eyed woman at the ribbon counter, and the group of children around her.

"Melissa," he said, "if you're through tradin', let's go down to Pap an' Mam White's for awhile, an' stay in town for the show to-night. Even if we do get home too late to do th' milkin', we can turn the calves in an' let them have it; the extra feed won't hurt them."

Melissa's eyes lighted, she smiled and nodded her head.

III

To be "properly buried" was an obsession with Silas Parker.

During the plague of influenza, at which time Pahsimaroi Valley's population was largely Mexican and Pappaloosa Indian, many victims of the disease, due to the exhaustion of the local coffin supply, had been buried in blankets. Since then, Silas had been an apostle of funereal preparedness.

It began at the interment of old Jose Lopez, who was being buried in a blanket. Silas had looked on in horror.

"My gosh!" he exclaimed. "That's terrible! He ain't got no protection at all! It's the most slipshod thing I ever heard of for a man to allow himself to be buried without even a coffin."

Jeff Coombs was one of the volunteer gravediggers.

"Old Jose is just as comfortable an' not a particle deader in a blanket," Jeff declared, "than he would be in a silver-trimmed box."

"It's slipshod," Silas gasped; "plumb slipshod!"

The more he thought of the matter the more slipshod it seemed to him. Silas, therefore, some days later, drove the forty miles to Tucson and made an investment.

"The style ain't important," he told the undertaker, "an' it don't matter about havin' a lot of fancy doo-dads on it; but it's got to be a good fit an' substantial made, 'specially substantial made."

Silas hauled the coffin home and installed it in the place of honor in the southeast corner of the spacious, although scantily furnished living room. There it had remained, a daily reminder to the bachelor of his own foresightedness and, with a Navaho blanket flung over it, a not uncomfortable day couch on which Silas and old Judas, the brindle tomcat, could lounge.

The sun was dropping behind the gray-brown peaks of Apache Range when Parker, after the tilt with Coombs, arrived at his lonely ranch. Judas stalked stiffly out to the buckboard as his master climbed down and unhitched the team.

Silas felt depressed; somehow he was dissatisfied with the way the argument had ended. Not until the evening chores were done, and supper finished, and he was stretched comfortably on the solid, well-built coffin in which he expected to be buried, did Silas regain a satisfied state of mind.

His quiescence was brief. It suddenly occurred to him that, while he was better prepared than most people to be buried properly, a funeral wouldn't be much satisfaction to a man unless he not only knew he was being laid away in a good, substantial made coffin, but that he had also some sort of an idea of the program that was being run off while the affair was in progress. It was a new thought and a disturbing one.

Silas frowned and confided in Judas.

"Tell me, you old gopher-eatin' devil," he demanded plaintively, "how in blue blazes can a man enjoy bein' buried unless he has provided a suitable program in advance, an' how in hell can it be did?"

Judas blinked his yellow eyes. It was too much for him.

A week later Providence, in the form of Val Thompson's old white-face bull, solved the problem. By rubbing the pasture wire loose where the foothill road joined the Maricola highway, at the lower end of Silas's ranch, the bull caused Silas to be busily and profanely engaged in tacking it back onto the posts at the time Jeff Coombs arrived at that particular spot *en route* to the county seat of Los Prunita County.

In the wagon with Jeff was his wife and

all seven of his children. Between Jeff's knees was an old-fashioned phonograph.

The team stopped automatically.

"Howdy, Silas?" Coombs inquired.

"Good morning, Mr. Parker," Jeff's wife added cheerfully. "Sit down, Mamie, you'll fall out!"

Silas glanced up, grunted a greeting, saw the phonograph—and in that instant inspiration was born in his brain.

"What you goin' to do with that thing?" he asked.

"Takin' it to Maricola to sell—" Jeff began.

"We're goin' to get a pianner!" a juvenile voice shouted gleefully.

Jeff grinned proudly.

"Remember that sorrel colt I bought at Turner's sale last fall?" he said. "Well, I sold him to Newt Williams yesterday for two hundred dollars. Old Felix has got a good pianner he took in on a debt, an' he's offerin' it for two seventy-five. Susie's gettin' big enough to take lessons, now, so Melissa an' me figured we'd sell the phonograph an' switch over to some handmade music for a change. Melissa's a good player, herself."

"I'm goin' to learn to play, too!" a childish treble asserted.

"Hush, Mabel, your pa is talkin'," Jeff's wife interposed.

"I—am goin'—to learn—" another tot announced.

"Yes, yes, honey. You all can learn, but keep still while your pa and Mr. Parker are talkin'."

"How much you askin' for it?" Silas inquired cautiously.

"Well, she's a good one," Jeff replied. "We give forty dollars for it; besides gettin' some new records, an' there's some extra blank ones—it's one of the kind you can talk into yourself if you want to. But we're shy twenty-five dollars on the price of the pianner, so that's what Melissa an' me estimated we'd take for the phonograph. Old Felix practically agreed to allow that much—but he'd probably just as soon have the cash."

IV

FIVE minutes later Jeff unloaded the phonograph at Silas's gate, carried it into the house, and initiated the new owner into the intricacies of its mechanism.

"Now, by gosh," Silas chuckled, when he stood alone and gazed admiringly at the

latest auxiliary to his arrangements to be buried properly, "all I got to do is pick out a bunch of favorable songs, mark 'em in suitable rotation, make my oration on one of them blank records, an' the whole works is attended to."

A shadow crossed Silas's face, a wistful look came into his eyes. "It's queer," he muttered pathetically, "that a woman as smart as the Widow McLean can't appreciate a man as foresighted as me!"

The following Saturday night, Silas, after a week of study, slid a blank record into the phonograph and, with manuscript in hand, started the machinery. Judas lay on the coffin and curiously watched the proceedings.

"Man born of woman is of few days," Silas began loudly in tones so solemn that they made even himself shiver, while the old tomcat sat up on the coffin and blinked wonderingly at this new note in his master's voice, "'an' full of trouble'—an' when it comes to dependin' on Providence, he ought to do a little plannin' on his own hook an' help Providence out as far as possible.

"Specially when it comes to bein' buried, a man ought to use his head an' think things out in advance, an' make suitable preparations to be properly buried when he is buried! But some people, like Jeff Coombs, for instance, are so darn shiftless an' slipshod that it's doubtful if they'll ever be buried at all; an' if they are buried it 'll probably be an accident, an' they'll more'n likely be buried in a blanket or even a gunny sack!"

Silas paused and laughed. He derived much pleasure from the thought that, in his personally conducted funeral oration, he could argue his philosophy to the limit, and take a few shots at Jeff, who wouldn't have any possible chance for a come back.

In a still louder voice Silas resumed his reading, thus:

"But Silas Parker, who is bein' buried on this momentous occasion, in the presence of the sorrowin' friends hereby assembled, believes in thinkin' things out ahead, an' is being buried in a coffin that he picked out himself an' paid for himself an' didn't ask no man to contribute toward it. In addition, he is bein' buried in an entire block of ground that he bought himself an' had put on record as his own personal property.

"Furthermore, the entire program bein'

rendered herewith is the result of foresighted arrangements made in advance by the said Silas Parker, even to the extent of the funeral oration hereby bein' executed. All of this—"

Parker stopped and cleared his throat. Old Judas climbed down from the coffin, stretched, yawned, and strolled over to his side.

"—ought to be an example to people in Los Prunita County," Silas continued, "and 'specially to Jeff Coombs, to pay attention to gettin' ready to be properly buried, an' not be so blamed slipshod an' careless in matters of that kind. One of the most vital things that can happen to a man is to be buried, an' yet—"

"Some men just live from day to day,
Like foolish, helpless sheep;
They don't realize that when they're dead—
They're always dead for keeps!"

"Those beautiful lines, made up by the author for this 'special occasion, are particularly adapted for men like Jeff Coombs, who spend their money goin' to circuses an' picture shows instead of for arrangements for bein' properly buried, an' if the said Silas Parker, now bein' buried, could speak from the yawnin' grave, his cold white lips would probably say to the said Jeff Coombs—"

At that inopportune moment Judas reared up and clawed playfully at Silas's right leg. The tomcat was strong, and his claws were sharp.

"Ouch!" Silas shouted. "Get down, you damned old fool, an' quit scratchin'! Now where the hell was I at? Oh, yes—"

"While the light holds out to burn the vilest sinner may return,' hence, quit bein' an idiot an' prepare to be properly buried! With this parting message we will now sing record number five, which is, 'Are You Ready?' after which the performance will be concluded, and we hope the congregation has enjoyed the program and won't be so careless about the future!"

Parker heaved a sigh of relief, mopped the perspiration from his forehead, and adjusted the record to reproduce.

"I hope she got it all," he murmured, rather proud of his effort, as he sat down to listen.

"Man born of woman—" came slowly and solemnly out of the horn. It thrilled Silas, causing little tinglings of awe to play up and down his spine.

"If the said Silas Parker, now bein' buried, could speak from the yawnin' grave, his cold white lips would probably say to the said Jeff Coombs, '*Ouch! Get down, you damned old fool, an' quit scratchin'!*'"

Silas sat up with a jerk.

"*Now where the hell was I at? Oh, yes—*" the phonograph remarked heatedly. "*'While the light holds out to burn—'*"

For a moment Parker was stunned, then he laughed heartily.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" he chuckled. "She even got my remarks to old Judas. I didn't think about her workin' then. It sounds kind of unusual, but it fits in, an' I'll let it stay. Nobody can say it ain't appropriate!"

Twice again Silas caused the phonograph to repeat the entire funeral program; and each time his remarks addressed to Jeff Coombs, but spoken to the tomcat, seemed more appropriate and funnier still. After the third rehearsal he carefully packed the records, marking them in the order in which they were to be played, deposited them in the coffin, set the phonograph on the coffin lid, covered it with a blanket, and retired for the night.

Silas sighed with deep satisfaction as he crawled into bed.

"Whatever happens now," he murmured, contentedly, "it's a cinch that I'm one individual that's goin' to be properly buried!"

Silas slept soundly and dreamed that the Widow McLean stood by his open grave and wept while she heard and saw him being interred, and eloquently regretted that she had not appreciated sooner his long distance foresightedness.

He smiled in his sleep.

V

THERE WAS a startling crash of glass as the window of Silas's sleeping room was smashed in; a strangling, smothering sensation grew in his chest; the thick, heavy fumes of smoke enveloped him. He felt himself yanked violently from the bed, dragged like a sack of potatoes across the room and tumbled unceremoniously out of the window onto the ground.

The next instant, Jeff Coombs, his hair singed, his face blistered, his clothing ablaze, dived headlong from the window, grabbed Silas and pulled him away from the roaring furnace that had been his home.

Silas sat up and looked wildly around.

At the fence was Jeff's team and wagon; in the wagon were Jeff's wife and all seven of Jeff's children. Overhead, an after midnight moon was starting its downward journey toward the ragged summits of the Apache Range.

"Pa'll git burned up!" "My pa'll git scorched!" childish voices were screaming in a terrified chorus.

"Hush, hush, children, your pa's out," Jeff's wife soothed them, her own voice trembling. "Your pa is out, and he—he—" There was a catch in Melissa's throat. "He was game, and got Mr. Parker out safe, too!"

Silas looked helplessly up into Jeff's grinning face.

"It's plumb providential," Coombs spluttered, jerking off his own flaming coat, "that I knowed which room you was sleepin' in!"

"I—I—must have left the kitchen lamp burnin'!" Silas stammered.

"And it's also additionally providential," Jeff went on, "that this was movin' picture night in Maricola, an' that we stayed in for the dance after the show, otherwise we wouldn't have been along here just at the inevitable tick of the clock we was, in which case you'd have gone up in a cloud of cinders an' hot air the same as your house is doin'!"

Silas Parker shivered. He was dressed only in his underwear, but it was not cold that caused him to tremble.

"Why, I—I—just got my oration fixed so I'd be—properly—buried," he muttered pathetically.

"You just come within a gnat's eye-winker of never needin' to be buried at all!" Jeff laughed, but not unkindly. "It would be pretty hard to 'properly'—or otherwise—bury a bunch of smoke. You'll have to go over to our house with us for the rest of the night. The fire'll soon burn down the house, but there ain't no danger of it catchin' the stable."

"I can sleep here in the hay mow," Silas protested.

"You're not goin' to sleep in no stable," Coombs announced firmly. "You'll snooze at our place in a bed. Throw me one of them quilts the children are settin' on, Melissa, for Silas to wrap around himself."

Dressed in clothing belonging to his host, Silas Parker sat silently down at the breakfast table with Jeff Coombs and his

family of seven, stair step children the following morning.

"Your house got all burned up, didn't it?" five-year-old Mabel remarked, looking with big blue eyes at Silas and nodding her yellow curls in sympathy.

Silas didn't know what or how to answer.

"But you didn't get burned up a bit, did you?" she continued, determined to make conversation.

"I'm sure glad Mr. Parker didn't get burned up," Sadie, next older to Mabel, declared, in a wish to add her condolence.

Their childish interest embarrassed, yet warmed with a strange new glow, the heart of Silas Parker.

"I'm glad my pa didn't get burned up!" little Jeff, two notches younger than Mabel, asserted, sturdily. "I don't want my pa to get burned up, never!"

Suddenly Parker realized that Coombs, on his half tilled homestead, in his unpretentious home, little more than a shack on this sloping foothill of southern Arizona, was rich—exceedingly rich.

"Hush, children, eat your mush," Jeff's wife interposed. "We're all mighty glad that nobody 'got burned up.'"

After breakfast Silas declined Jeff's offer to hitch up the team and take him back to his own ranch.

"I'd rather walk," Parker said. "I kind of want to think. But—but I'm much obliged for the bed an' breakfast, an' for—gettin' me out of the house last night."

"Forget it!" Jeff laughed. "What's neighbors for? Anyhow, it wasn't me"—yielding to an irresistible impulse—"it was Providence. Providence *minus* plus!"

Silas grinned.

"I—I—reckon you're right, Jeff!" he admitted slowly.

"We'll expect you back, to make our place your headquarters till you get things fixed up again," Jeff called out as the bachelor started away.

A half hour later Silas Parker stood looking at the melancholy heap of ashes that only a short time before he had called "home." In spite of his loss there was a sense of peace, a peculiar happiness, in his heart.

"But I reckon it roasted poor old Judas!" he murmured.

A distressed "*Meow!*" was the answer to that observation as a badly singed cat crawled from under the granary.

"Now how in Sam Hill do you suppose he got out?" Silas asked, looking down at the cat. Judas stared back and blinked his yellow eyes.

Silas walked over and kicked around among the ashes.

"Them's the handles," he mused, as his foot uncovered some fire-blackened pieces of metal. He stood a few moments, contemplating the now useless relics, the sole reminders of his ambition to be "properly buried."

"It's funny what a danged fool a man can get to be—one of whom I was which!" he muttered. Then he smiled; in his face there was a new confidence. He turned, went to the stable, and began to harness his horse.

VI

THE Widow McLean was in her garden, gathering peas for dinner, when Silas Parker stopped his team an hour later at the gate. He climbed out of the buckboard, tied the buckskin horse to the lone cottonwood tree in front of the house, and walked boldly out to where the matronly figure was bending over the vines.

"Good mornin', Hetty," he said. "Let's get married!"

The widow straightened up, startled, not by Silas's presence, but by his words and the tone of his voice. Her cheeks flamed.

"Oh, why—good morning—Silas."

This was a different appearing man to the rather morose and stubborn one that Hetty had hitherto known. His gray eyes had a strange twinkle in them; his lips were quivering with a half restrained smile. This Silas Parker, the widow concluded, was exceedingly human—if not actually handsome.

"I said: 'Let's get married, Hetty!'" Silas repeated.

"I told—you—once, Mr. Parker," she made a brave attempt to be stern, although her voice was a bit shaky, "I decline to live with any—coffin."

Silas laughed loudly.

"I haven't got a coffin, Hetty," Silas replied. "An' that ain't all! I don't want any coffin; personally, I'm through with 'em. My house, coffin, everything burned up last night—an' I'm glad of it! Yes, ma'am, as far as I'm concerned, coffins are plumb out of style. I'm goin' to build a new house, an' I want you to help me plan it."

"Oh, Silas!" the widow gasped and took a step backward in ladylike precaution.

"Let's get married, Hetty, an' have Jeff an' Melissa Coombs an' all seven of their children, an' your Sally an' Sam—*our* Sally an' Sam—at the weddin' to help us enjoy it. Then we'll all go to a picture show after it's over. I ain't interested in being

properly buried any more, Hetty. What I'm figurin' on now is to be *properly alive!*"

Hetty looked up, and Silas saw his answer in her blue eyes.

"Jeff and Melissa are my dearest friends," she said, "and I'd just love to—to go to a picture show. *Silas! Be careful! You'll make me spill these peas!*"

The Silver Cliff

THE READER IS WARNED NOT TO BUY ANY MINING STOCK
ON THE STRENGTH OF THIS STRANGE TALE
OF A MOUNTAIN OF PRECIOUS METAL

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

IN western New Mexico, south of the Santa Fe Railway, stands what is perhaps the most interesting cliff in the world. On it are inscribed, in letters cut with dagger points, the names of Don Juan de Oñate and others, the first Spanish explorers of this land—names more than three hundred years old.

Among these august signatures were to be found, until not long ago—for they have recently been obliterated by a protecting hand—the common names of common men, tourists of our own day. We were talking of these vandals and their desecrations when Mr. Shireman of—Oklahoma, I think he came from—spoke up:

"If those chaps had known, they wouldn't have stuck their names there. It's no use abusing them. The amount of condensed and bottled ignorance in this world is past belief, and a man may be a saint and a sage and still be one of the bottles. Moreover, he may be a darned sight happier."

It was in the smoke room of a Seattle boat, and through the port you could see the pine covered hills and gleaming beaches of Vancouver Island. The throb of the screw and the lift of the keel followed Shireman's remarks, with others from the creaking beams and the lamps swinging in their gimbals.

The gentleman from Oklahoma continued after a moment's pause:

"It's strange you mentioning those writings just here and now, and my saying that on the spur of the moment, so to speak, not thinking of Billy Nutt, who just jumped into my head, though it's twenty years since I saw him last. It's twenty-one years, to be correct—twenty-one years, three months, and four days, to be precise, for I've one of those memories that never forget a date.

"I met him at San José, which is the southernmost of the Perlas Islands in the Bay of Panama, eight degrees north of the equator. San José doesn't properly belong to that latitude. It belongs to Hades, and was towed out of there, climate and devils and all complete, with the devils turned to mosquitoes and lizards and scorpions, and anchored in the Bay of Panama.

"Billy was on the beach, scratching himself, and prospecting for the gold of a wreck which was supposed to have been heaved up there forty years before, but wasn't. If it was, the land crabs had eaten its bones and the scorpions cashed in the gold bars. When I came there, Billy had come to the conclusion that his quest was hopeless, and was preparing to hike off in search of something else.

"That chap wasn't a man so much as

a syndicate. He'd been in fifteen treasure expeditions, and there wasn't a gold rush from the Chilkoot to Ballarat, as you might say, in which he hadn't led the running, according to his own prospectus, which also stated that he'd made three fortunes. Barring being able to read and write, he was the ignorantest creature the Lord ever put feet on; but for all that he held you like a storybook.

"I must tell you that a year before this I'd cleared up more than half a million dollars in phosphates. It was the El Madroño business—I dare say you've heard of it. A lawsuit bit a big chunk out of the profits, or I'd have been a clean million to the good. However, I took five hundred thousand dollars, put them in the bank, which is the best place for dollars, and started in to amuse myself. I was twenty years younger then, but a fortnight of San Francisco amusements was as much as I could stand, and out I put in an old schooner that I hired from McGinnis to hunt the coast for more dollars. I was keen to see the prospects of the shark fishing business in Lower California as a field for the investor; but I found Magdalena Bay overfished, and the American fleet at gun practice there. It was a fine sight, but I hadn't come out to see sights, so I put on down the coast, making for Panama and Balboa.

"Money smells as well as talks. I tell you I hadn't been in those parts three days before every sort of shark was following after me. Pearl islands, treasure hid in the Galapagos, sunk wrecks only five fathoms deep, gambling hells in San Luis Potosi, opium smuggling, the chance of leading a rebellion in Chile and making myself president, so that I could scoop the treasury—easy money was lying all around me, only waiting for me to put out my hand, but I wasn't having any.

"I put out and reached San José Island, and it was there, as I was telling you, that I met Billy. I brought him on board the ship for fun, same as you might bring a monkey. His talk on the beach had amused me.

"Down in the cabin, when we had settled to our drinks, I began to talk myself, telling him how I'd come along down looking out for business, and how the whole cheese was full of rats and nothing left but the rind.

"That's so," says Billy. "It's rotten

apples these days. Between the Chinks and the Yanks, there isn't a handle you can turn that hasn't been twisted off its crank, to say nothing of this infernal wireless that brings a gunboat on top of you if you as much as sneeze. Blackbirding and barratry and gun running and opium smuggling—where are they? All gone. There hasn't been a revolution bigger than a child's Catherine wheel in a donkey's years, and where's the minerals? Where's gold? I'm asking you that—where's gold? Old Mother Earth hasn't said a word since she said "Klondyke"—and then she croaked, seems to me. I tell you, since I was cleared out of my last fortune I spent one night on a bench in Central Park, N'York, and I couldn't sleep a wink. I sleep best in the open, but I couldn't sleep a wink, thinking of the spending I'd seen all day, and the sure certainty of a gold famine. It's dead sure to come, and then they'll be catching old-timers like myself and putting us through the third degree to find out where the gold mines have hid themselves. Search me, I don't know where they are, I've raked the whole world, but they ain't there. I could tell you where there's silver—and, mark my words, the time for silver is coming.

"Yes," he goes on, "I know where there's silver enough to sink the Leviathan if it was put aboard for cargo; and that's the first and foremost reason of my being in these parts. I took up this wreck business on the off chance, but silver is what I came for—and what I'm going to get, if I can find a partner with two dollars and the pluck of a sand flea," he says, getting up and walking the cabin like a chap with a toothache. "Silver, stacks of silver, easy to come at and easy to smelt, silver enough to make Rockefeller's eyes pop out of his head, and only waiting the guy to take it."

"He's here," said I.

"Then that chap sat down opposite me and put his hand in his pocket, as if to take out a prospectus—did it automatically and from habit, as it were, but he fetched out nothing.

"I've no papers," he said, "but I've got the location in my head, safe and sound. I could lead you to it in the dark."

"If it's as easy as that—" said I.

"I was speaking figuratively," he cut in.

"Well," I said, "spit it out, spit it out. We've got all the evening and all that Bourbon to work on. Give us the story;

but first tell me, if you've known of the stuff all this while, and can find it in the dark, why haven't you found it?"

"Picking up a silver mine isn't exactly like picking up a pin," he says. "You want capital to work it, and you want a partner to trust."

"Then he began his yarn. I've told you he was ignorant. He didn't know the difference between Julius Cæsar and Judas Iscariot, but he could talk.

"San Miguel Bay lies near due west of where we are lying now," said he. "I put in there on Christmas Day three years ago, with a chap by the name of Ramon Gomez. It was like me and you. Gomez had the location of this mine in his head, and I had the dollars to get the concession and help work it. Naturally I wouldn't part with the bricks till I'd seen the ground, and he was taking me to his exhibit by way of a trading boat we'd picked up from the Gulf of Montijo, which was where I'd met him. It put us out at Real de Santa Maria, which is near the foothills of the Sierra del Sapo, and there we hired burros and bought picks and provisions and assaying scales and set off for the mountains.

"It wasn't a short way, but there were roads of sorts between village and village; and sure enough, when we got to the spot, there were the indications—black lumps of horn silver leading to a cliff of a mountain that's pretty well all silver, to judge by the specimens I took. I told Ramon it looked good enough for me—and for my money.

"I was so full of the find that I brought out my bank roll to show him, nine thousand dollars all but a hundred—which was a foolish thing to do, seeing he thought all my money was in the bank at Panama. Then we packed the mules and started.

"We'd got to a cliff edge path when what seemed to me like the shadow of a big bird hit the rump of the mule in front of me, and I turned. It was no bird—it was a spade that Ramon had lifted to flatten me. The next moment we had clinched, and the next he was over the edge. I looked over. That cliff was eight hundred feet to the valley bottom, if it was an inch. Four hundred foot down there was a screw pine sticking out with Ramon on it—falling, as you may say, and caught in the act. He was waving his arms and screeching.

"Pretty soon a condor dropped from

nowhere and began to make sweeps around him, and then more came in a hurry, like chaps flocking to a quick lunch counter. The tree had speared him through the back of his coat, and all at once it gave way, and he fell the other four hundred feet to the valley rocks. The birds dropped near as quick as he did, and that was the end of Ramon.

"Well, he'd tried to do the same to me, so I didn't set up any lamentations. I hiked on, and reached Santa Maria, and I tell you I had a big thirst on me. The night I got there I tried to leave it behind me in a bar, and then, somehow or another, I got into a faro joint, and woke in the morning with a mescal head on me and my roll gone.

"Since then I've never been able to catch those dollars again. I've been in a small way scraping here and scraping there, with that silver mine in my head, as you may say, and no chance of working it.

"I tried to interest some rich guys in San Francisco, but they wouldn't look at it—only looked at my boots, which was mostly uppers. You get me, a down and out trying to sell a silver lode is on as likely a tack as a chap trying to sell mufflers in Hades; so I left for the sea again as an oiler on the Hawaiian line, and skipped, and got into a pineapple cannery. I got a few bucks together, went into a wrecking job, and rose to four hundred. Then I chummed with a Chink, ran dope, and rose to two thousand eight hundred. I speculated in coconuts, took the lot, and speculated on this treasure hunt—and here I am, busted again."

II

"That's what Billy told me down in the cabin," said the man from Oklahoma; "and he told it as if he was telling the truth.

"Billy," I said, "your trials and afflictions have my sympathy, but I'm not parting with any money over this proposition. It's too good."

"What do you mean?" he asks.

"I mean," said I, "there's too much silver in it. It's not a mine, according to you—it's a mountain."

"That's so," said he. "A mountain of dollars is what you might call it. I'm not asking you to put money into it, I'm asking you to take money out of it. You don't believe me when I say this is the biggest

thing on earth. Well, now, do I look like a fool? Do I look like a man who'd hike over those mountains unless he was sure of where he was going and what he was wanting? That's what I'm proposing to do, if you'll come for the walk with me. When you've seen the stuff and touched it, you'll be ready enough to put up the money to get the concession and start the working. I can't say fairer than that. I want nothing at the start, only the price of mule hire and the promise of a half share in the profits.'

" 'We'll talk of it in the morning,' I said, and we did.

"I fell to agreeing with him. The thing seemed good enough to speculate a few hundred dollars on, and I only had to put the boat over to San Miguel Bay to be right on the base of the expedition.

"Two days later we got to Santa Maria. We put up at an inn that was half a veranda, with chaps sitting about in basket chairs, smoking cigarettes, and drinking coffee. That was their business in life. At one o'clock in the afternoon, having stuffed itself with garlic and tomatoes, the town went to sleep. It woke up again about four, when it pulled up its blinds and ordered coffee. After dark it let off fireworks, and after that the mandolins would begin serenading girls. The sound of these mixed with the guitars from the tango hells, and the cats, and the bullfrogs, and the mosquitos, and chaps being murdered down back alleys and telling the world of their troubles. All these kept on till four in the morning, or maybe five, when the cocks and the church bells took on.

"And all that work was backed with nothing stronger than coffee and lemonade and cigarettes. It was an amazing place, but difficult if you were on business and hustled for time.

"Next day, when we set out to hire mules, we struck a church festival—nothing doing. The next day was a national celebration and a free fight with the anti-nationalists. I tell you we mixed with that town; and before we'd been mixing with it long, we found we were being followed by a chap with rings in his ears.

" 'Lord,' said Billy, 'it's either that chap Ramon or his brother. It can't be him, for I saw him killed dead with my own eyes, and the birds eating him. It must be his brother. When I got back that time I told the story of how he'd missed

his footing and killed himself, and the police believed me; but there's always the family to be reckoned with in a place like this, and they never forget.'

"That sounded cheerful. I began to wish I hadn't come, but I wasn't going to back out now I'd put my foot into the thing; and next day, seeing no more of the chap with the jewelry, we got our mules and grub for three weeks and put out.

"From Santa Maria we reached Paso, a village in the foothills, and from there Madelion, a place high up in the mountains. From there the trail led south by thousand-foot precipices and down dips that nothing but a mule could have taken, the big birds watching us and nothing else. However, we hadn't come out to seek company. We went along happy enough till toward noon on the day we left Madelion Billy took a back look and said we were being followed.

"And sure enough we were, for, miles back along the track, we saw a fellow with a mule.

"We sat down, and he came to a halt. We went on, and he did ditto. He was following us sure enough, and that night, when we camped, I couldn't rest. We set watches, tossing a coin for who'd turn in first. I won, and turned in, but couldn't get to sleep, thinking of that chap behind us, maybe on us, any moment. Then, when my four hours was up, Billy took the straw and began to snore directly he lay down.

"That was the sort of man he was—without education, and without all the frills that education gives to the imagination. He'd never read stories of Red Indians on the war path, or vendettas and so on. He had no worries about a future life, and as for dying, he had never studied the matter. He just went asleep and slept like a tombstone till it was time to start.

"Then, as we hitched up, he noticed that I was frazzled.

" 'Billy,' I said, 'this thing is going to do me in. What with the mountain air, and with that guy that's after us, I'm in for one of my attacks of insomnia.'

" 'What's that?' Billy wanted to know.

" 'It's the Latin for not being able to get to sleep,' I told him.

"Billy scratched his head and looked back along the track. There, sure enough, was the chap at his usual distance, some three miles off.

"'He's after me, not you,' said Billy, 'and I'm not worrying any.'

"'Maybe not,' I said, 'but we're made different. It will do me in, for a man's no use without sleep, and I can never get a wink with the feel of that behind me.'

"Billy was an understanding man, though ignorant. When we camped that night, he said he'd have to attend to this thing. He told me to lie down and keep quiet, and left me, hiking back along the way we'd come.

"Then I lay under the stars, listening, till the moon came riding over the peaks.

"This part of the mountains we were in now was the Sierra Darien, which is a continuation of the Sierra del Sapo. There was no wind and no sound, and the whole world seemed dead asleep, until suddenly there came the noise of a shot a great way off. It might have been Billy's automatic, or it mightn't.

"Nearly an hour later he returned.

"'I reckon we can get to sleep now,' he remarked.

"'Billy,' I said, 'won't they find the mule? What have you done with her?'

"'Hove her traps over a precipice,' said he, 'and gave her a whack on the rump. She'll run wild in the mountains. Get to sleep.'

"Next day there was no one following us. All the same, I was being followed. I knew that inquests were barred out in the mountains by the birds, but birds don't swallow jewelry.

"'Billy,' I asked, 'what about those earrings?'

"'Got them in my pocket,' said Billy.

"I said nothing more. It came to me that he'd collected that jewelry not for himself, but for the sake of his partner who couldn't sleep. Something sort of grand in that, wasn't there?—doing for me what he wouldn't do for himself."

III

THE man from Oklahoma paused for liquid refreshment, and a person in the corner by the door cut in.

"I don't know where you're getting to with this story," he said. "Seems to me you started off from those autographs cut on rocks and went on to—"

"The same thing, if you'll listen," replied the narrator. "Well, as I was saying, or would have been saying if you'd kept your chin out, we went on along the

trail. About noon of the next day Billy came to a stop.

"'Here we are,' he said. 'Smell that!'

"He picked up a chunk of dark stuff, and it was horn silver. Then he led the way up a little cañon to a cliff where the outcrop was. Sure enough, as he'd told me, that cliff was all outcrop. Silver mine? It was a hill of silver!

"I sat down at the foot of the cliff and held my head, to keep it flying off me. From where I sat, looking down the cañon, I could see the Pacific. We must have been six thousand feet up, and the ocean thirty or forty miles away, so you couldn't see ships—just a blue streak with a few white clouds across the rim.

"I remember that the thought came to me, sitting there, how mining was to be carried on at that height. One could do smelting in the cañon, but what bothered me was getting the bar silver down to San Miguel Bay—till I remembered the existence of mules. It was the country of mules; they were the railways and omnibuses of the place, cheap transport and lots of it. I was putting up a hymn of praise to the man who invented mules when I heard Billy, who was prospecting along the cliff, let out an oath as if a wasp had stung him.

"'We're not the first here!' he cries. 'A chap's been cutting his silly name on the rock!'

"I jumped like a pea on a struck drum, and next moment I was beside him.

"'There!' said he, pointing.

"There before me, cut in the rock, was the word:

CORTEZ

"Deep cut, though worn with weather, there it was. No Christian name, no date. It wanted nothing of that, no more than the name of Napoleon or Alexander would have done.

"It took maybe ten seconds for the thing to sink into me, and then there came up from the back of my memory the words of the immortal poet John Keats about 'stout Cortez' and his men standing 'upon a peak in Darien,' gazing at the Pacific 'in wild surmise.'

"'What are you going on like that for?' says Billy, watching my face. 'We're safe enough. You can't stake a claim by writing your name on it. The chap's done no work, and if he comes back on us there's

no court in the Americas that wouldn't hoof him out.'

"'Hoof him out!' I said. 'Why, you darned fool, that's Cortez!'

"'I don't care if he was J. P. Morgan,' says Billy, 'he has no rights here. Cortez—and who is he, anyhow?'

"'He's dead,' said I.

"'Then what are you cutting up about?' asked Billy.

"'It's just this way, Billy,' said I, as one might explain things to a child. 'We're on the Darien mountains, and it was here, about four hundred years ago, that a great Spaniard named Cortez led his men, hunting for silver, maybe, same as we are. Right there he cut his name on the rock, and here he stood, maybe where we are now, gazing at the Pacific. You see, he came to find silver, and suddenly found that he'd found the Pacific. No one had heard of the Pacific in those days.'

"'You'll be telling me next they'd never heard of Frisco!' Billy scornfully remarked.

"I left it at that. There was no use in talking to him about it, no more use than lecturing a starfish on astronomy. He went off to tend the mules and left me in peace before that mighty name written on the face of the world, as you may say, fronting the west and the vast Pacific Ocean.

"Next day, having taken samples of the rock, we started the mules and began our hike back. Billy was beaming, but I wasn't happy. That name was following me more relentlessly than Ramon had done. Well I knew that once we'd got our concession and started our company it would have to come down. The whole face of that hill would come down. I said this to Billy, and he agreed.

"I remarked at the start off that the amount of bottled ignorance in the world has never been taken stock of, and that a man may be happier if he's one of the bottles. It was so with Billy. He had never read Keats's sonnets, and he didn't appreciate the horror of what we were lending our hand to.

"'Billy,' I told him, 'if this thing got about, if a whisper of it went to the world, every archæological society in the United States, to say nothing of the uplift clubs, the reading societies, the young women's associations, and so on, would be on their feet. You'd have a procession of five million people hiking to here.'

"'I reckon that's true,' says he; 'but

where's the trouble? No one can touch an ounce of the stuff if we once get our concession.'

"I left it at that. There was no use in sailing on that tack with Billy, but I'd made up my mind that unless an earthquake did the trick that name was not going to come down—at least, not with my assistance. It would be like taking down Westminster Abbey, or the dome of St. Peter's at Rome. I had money enough, anyhow, and the only question was how to head Billy off.

"I did it by arguing that the natives would never let us pull off a concession, that all we'd get would be knives in our backs, that if we did get a concession it would take eighteen thousand years to get the mine working in that country, where you never could get anything done till tomorrow, and that, anyhow, it took a gold mine to work a silver mine.

"He came to see all that, but what did most to shake him off was Ramon's family, who went for us with questions when we got to San José."

A fat man, who was seated near the man from Oklahoma, and who had been listening with open mouth and rapt attention, struck himself on the thigh.

"Well, this is the most extraordinary thing in the whole world!" said he. "This gets me completely. I know the Sierra Darien—ought to, since I went all over that range when I was a boy of eighteen. That would be nearly twenty years before you were there. I'm now seventy-one, though I don't look more than fifty. Now tell me, you went from Paso to Madelion, and then took the south trail till you reached that cañon, which was facing west—it is the only cañon facing west, as you will have observed. I went up that cañon the same as you did, but knowing nothing of geology, my party did not recognize the silver ore nature of the place. You knew it was silver ore, yet you refused to profit by it for the sake of the wonderful historical interest of the spot.

"Sir, you did honor to yourself and your great country. As a Canadian I say that; but you sacrificed your interests in vain. To my shame be it said—excuse my emotion—I was a boy full of life and the mischief of youth. It was I who cut that name upon the rock, the sacred name of Cortez, saying that some fool would find

it some time—and now my act has found me out. I was doubly wrong, for I have since learned that it was not Cortez who discovered the Pacific, as Keats said, but Balboa."

"But this is *great!*" said the man from Oklahoma. "The stuff is there still, only waiting to be lifted, and now the only barrier is gone! Great! It's more than that—it's fate. Sir, come into the bar!"

They went out for drinks, and a lumber man from Seattle rose up and stretched.

"That's the most extraordinary coincidence that has ever come to my knowledge," said he.

"That yarn?" I said.

"I'm not talking of any yarn," said he. "I'm talking of the meeting here in the same place and at the same moment of time, so to speak, of those two chaps—the two biggest liars on the Pacific coast!"

Which was the nearest thing to truth that had been heard in that smoke room for a long time past.

End of Battle

IN THIS PEACEFUL LAND OF SNOWS THE BLOOD OF YOUTH
STRANGELY RUNS AT FEVERED HEAT

By William Merriam Rouse

THERE is repose for the human spirit in the blue Laurentian Mountains; but there was no peace at the turn of a wood road where Jean Delage stood facing Marie Choquette. The air about them, which should have been heavy with cold, seemed to smolder—as bits of charred log smolder in the fireplace before they burst into flame.

It did not matter that there was frozen snow beneath their feet, nor that the forest hidden mountains, billowing to heaven about them, were in the tight grip of a Quebec winter. In the raging dark eyes of Marie Choquette there seemed to be fire enough to melt all that wilderness of snow and ice.

"Who are you to take possession of me?" she cried, nursing a small, round wrist where lately the steel fingers of Delage had bitten through gantlet mitten and woolen sleeve.

She shook her head, dashing back yellow curls which were forever breaking away from the sealskin confines of her cap. Seal-skin and the finest wool from the smart shops in the upper city of Quebec clothed Marie, for although the members of the family Choquette were *habitants*, they had money, and this only daughter had been much to school.

The girl stood very straight; slender in spite of a thickly furred jacket. Her brown eyes blazed fury and indignation upon the young man before her.

He regarded her with his deep-set eyes; darkly blue, speculative, sullen. The depth of his chest made him look clumsy in the clothing of winter, but he was not. It was only that he expanded above the waist gracefully, and this gave him the appearance of being bigger than he really was.

As a matter of fact, Jean Delage was as light on his feet in a fight as he was in a jig; and since from the Americans he had learned to box, there were not many in the *chantiers* of the woodchoppers who cared to do battle with him. A young man whose fighting education has begun in the *mêlées* of the camps and finished with *la boxe* is not to be trifled with.

Now Delage spoke to Marie, and his voice was hoarse with poorly suppressed anger. It was true that a moment before he had taken her by the wrist; and that by means of his other arm he had crushed her in a viselike headlock.

It had been his intention to kiss Marie Choquette; not once, but many times. Where could one find a place better than here, under the pale and lovely blue of the winter sky, and with pines and hemlocks

like sentinels to guard the secrecy of caresses.

The lips of Marie were crimson and full. If such lips were not made for kisses, then good wine was not made to drink.

"I love thee!" he said.

Her cheeks flamed; red banners and black fire stabbed him from her eyes.

"You!" she choked. "Who gave you the right to 'thee' and 'thou' me? Or is it that I am a servant?"

"I wanted to marry you! I was going to ask—"

"*Mon Dieu!* He wanted to! But he does not now? First he wanted to choke me and break my arm—"

"I wanted to kiss you!" Jean barked.

"I want to now and—"

"So that was why you tried to kill me! Truly, this man belongs in the bush with the moose and the bear!"

"There are worse places!" he cried. "And perhaps wilder animals down here near the St. Lawrence!"

"Scoundrel!" Marie gasped, and he knew that never before had a young man dared to talk to her thus. "Do you call me 'animal'?"

"I call you beautiful!" Delage replied, with a smile twitching at the grimness of his mouth. "You are so beautiful that in a minute I am going to try again to kiss you, and this time I shall not fail!"

"If you dare I'll put my father's knife into your heart!" she stormed. "Do you think César Choquette will allow his daughter to be mauled about by a mere *bûcheron*? Do you think I have no one to protect me? Do you think that Georges Painchaud would permit you to abuse me like this, if he were here? He would break you in two, that man!"

Now Delage was angry again, and he took a step nearer, so that his snowshoes almost touched hers. That giant of a Painchaud! As if one could not handle these big men much more easily than the small ones!

"Why don't you go home if you are being abused?" Jean demanded; and this was the worst thing he could have said. "Have I tried to stop you? And as for Painchaud! If I were afraid of that hunk of beef I would never try to kiss another girl!"

"Another girl—" Marie was now close to tears, but an ocean of tears would not have dampened her wrath. "So you go

about kissing girls, do you? And you dare to think of marrying me? If I had the strength—"

She broke off so suddenly that Delage knew something had happened, even before he read the look in her dark eyes. They were staring over his shoulder, beyond him, and in them there was a most unholy and unchristian satisfaction.

He whirled, with the skill that a lifetime on snowshoes gives, and found himself forced to raise his chin to meet the chill gaze of the man who was standing a dozen feet away.

Georges Painchaud, of a dignity beyond his years, and of a size to startle the hearts of timid men, may or may not have followed them into the forest. It was, however, reasonably certain that a promising young notary of Rivière des Chines had ordinarily no business affairs this far back in the mountains.

It was to be assumed that he had come out to the farm of the family Choquette for the purpose of seeing Marie, and that he had not been content to wait quietly by the kitchen stove while she wandered over the nearly deserted roads with a handsome and dare-devil woodsman.

The eyes of Painchaud were the color of the ice in the mighty St. Lawrence, where it freezes clear and hard and deep. The shoulders of his bright plaid jacket blocked themselves out against the blackish green of the forest, as though he were a monument set up there. When a *Canadien* grows broad and tall he makes a thorough job of it; Georges Painchaud was accounted the strongest man in his parish.

"What do you want here?" Delage asked, in a voice as smooth as satin. "*Mademoiselle* and I have not asked you to these mountains!"

"Is it necessary that one be invited to the Laurentians?" Painchaud demanded, and his words clinked together as though they had been struck out of metal. "And by a *bûcheron*? *Purbleu!* I have heard enough to know that Mlle. Choquette desires to be rid of you! Is it not so, Marie?"

If she had not hesitated for just a little fraction of time, Jean Delage might have swung off, with no more than a mocking laugh, for although he loved her, and most naturally hated his rival, he was not a man of a cruel or a bloodthirsty heart. It was seldom that he had fought without reasonable cause.

But now he saw the swift changes that chased each other across the face of Marie Choquette; he noted the little catch of hesitation in her voice when she replied to Painchaud:

"Of course I want to be rid of him! Do you think I want to see any more of a man like him? Bold! Impertinent! Rough! *Mon Dieu!* But, no!"

It was as though she were trying to convince herself, and Jean Delage almost smiled. He turned to Painchaud, that threatening man mountain, with a lift of the shoulders and a jaunty set to his head.

"These women!" he exclaimed. "When they scold most they mean least! Is it not true, my friend?"

The enormous mittens of Georges Painchaud, big as the paws of a bear, moved slightly. It was plain to read the intention in that movement.

"It is true that unless you go I am going to give you such a beating that you will never again annoy Mlle. Choquette!" he said, solemnly.

The heart of Jean Delage hummed to the tune of battle, and he did not try to still it. He kicked off his snowshoes, smiling grimly. The footing in the wood road was rough, but fairly solid; for although the snow lay in lumps and ruts, it had been packed by the passage of wood sleighs, and it was frozen.

Off the road it was soft and dry, and deep enough so that a man without snowshoes would sink to his middle. Delage took account of these things, and planned accordingly.

Barely had his moccasins freed themselves from the rawhide thongs of his snowshoes when Painchaud advanced, without haste, but with the menace of an avalanche as it begins to gather force. An avalanche—or a bull moose. He towered over Jean; and the smaller man's feet patted lightly against the snow.

Delage allowed himself one swift glance at Marie. She stood flushed, a little frightened, with parted lips.

Painchaud had made the mistake of keeping his snowshoes on; perhaps he thought they would be an advantage, or it may have been that he scorned any precautions for a battle with an antagonist who did not measure up to his own great stature. Certainly he reached for Delage carelessly, as if he expected that *bûcheron* to stand perfectly still and be caught in

arms which could have crushed even his sturdy ribs.

Jean melted away from that embrace like a shadow. And then he struck; not one great blow such as a man who was merely a rough-and-tumble fighter would have used, but a hailstorm of little punches. He sprinkled Georges Painchaud with those blows which he had learned from the American boxers; and by the time Painchaud had righted himself again, staggering, Delage was far enough away to be safe. The big man was shaken and half blinded, and his strength was of little use to him in this kind of combat.

If but once Georges Painchaud could have closed his arms around the body of Delage, there would have been an end to the battle; if but one of his swinging fist strokes had caught Jean, that would have finished the affair. But neither of these things happened, and, after long minutes, and many of them, back and forth upon the trampled snow, Painchaud was weakened and stumbling.

Not so Jean Delage. He danced as though he heard the music of a fiddle.

Then Georges, who had seen the wisdom of getting rid of his snowshoes, stumbled and went into the soft snow at the side of the road. He floundered and went down, truly as helpless as the hunters find a moose in midwinter, and immediately Delage was upon him like a hornet. The giant was completely overthrown.

When Jean got back to the road and looked down upon the fallen Painchaud, scarcely able to move, he was filled with triumph. He felt his chest puffing out and, as only his fists had suffered in this fight, pride lifted him like trumpet blasts.

He stood dizzily upon the heights of pride until he heard the voice of Marie Choquette, and realized what she was doing, and then he fell with such a plunge as they say the Evil One took when he was cast out of heaven.

Marie was struggling to Painchaud, flinging words over her shoulder at Jean. It was not so much the words as the look upon her face, cold with horror, that told Delage that now she was indeed in earnest. There was no slightest hesitation to hint that she might change her mind.

"Get out of my sight, Jean Delage!" she cried. "Go away and never let me see you again! I thought you were a brute, but I was fool enough to believe that there

was some good in you! Now I know it was a lie! Go!"

II

THE library of the *presbytère* in the village of Rivière des Chiens was a very pleasant room, with a grate fire at one end and books from floor to ceiling wherever space was not needed for doors and windows.

It was a friendly room, but the most pleasant thing in it was the face of Father Sylvestre Laplante, who was sitting in one of the big easy-chairs by the fire. His hair was the rugged iron gray that of a strong man who has climbed well on in years; but his face was so softened by kindness and by the blessing of *le bon Dieu* that one noticed his gentleness rather than the broad shoulders and the hammerlike fist.

Father Laplante had the *Imitatio Christi* open upon his lap, and he had just permitted himself to believe that there would be an afternoon free for meditation when the sound of his housekeeper's voice warned him that he had made a mistake. It was understood that those in great trouble were to come in at any time, and so he was not much surprised when an agitated young man stood before him, breathing hard and staring down at the priest with the eyes of an animal in pain.

"Jean Delage!" Father Laplante exclaimed. "Now, you are the last man I would expect to see looking as though the world had slipped out from under your feet."

"I am in great distress, *mon père!*" Jean muttered, as he sat down at a gesture of invitation. "And there is no help for me."

"Then why come seeking it?" Father Laplante smiled. "Poof! How can you be in trouble? You are as strong as a young bull, the girls all like you, and your pockets are lined with money."

"It is a woman!" Jean said, in a voice of desperation.

"More often than not it is a woman, my son! Tell me what has happened."

Then Delage, with all fairness, related what had taken place that forenoon in the foothills of the Laurentians beyond the *maison Choquette*; and the priest heard him through with a face in which pity and sorrow were mingled. When Jean had finished he closed the *Imitatio Christi* and put the tips of his fingers together, squinting into the fire as though he were giving deep thought to this problem.

"Of your conduct I will say nothing just now, for it appears that you are suffering enough," the priest remarked. "The thing to do at this time is to restore peace to your soul."

"I have had no peace since she spoke to me like that," Jean replied, with his hands gripping the arms of his chair. "Marie is the only girl I have ever wanted to marry—or ever shall. And I have lost her."

"It seems that you have," the good father murmured. "*Eh bien!* Let us see—I would suggest that you stay here in Rivière des Chiens for a time. Yes, we must have a little time if we are to help you. Come to me whenever you like. In the meantime do not brood; amuse yourself as much as you can. And I will tell you of something that you can do for me. There is a poor widow, with one child, who has just come to the parish. Mme. Alma Morin and her Céleste. Mme. Morin will be glad of the money for a few weeks' board. Will you do that? It will be better for you with the Morin family than at the inn, for just now you are in a mood to drink too much."

"Of course I will do it!" Jean cried. "Anything—I must talk to some one. Alone in the woods I'd go mad with too much thought."

Thus it came about that Jean Delage was talking, half an hour later, to an agreeable, middle-aged woman in a small stone house on the outskirts of Rivière des Chiens. The floor of the kitchen was scrubbed to a delicate flesh pink, and the odor that came from a big iron pot on the stove told him that he was going to enjoy the *soupe aux pois* in that household.

"Yes, you may live here as long as you like," Mme. Morin told him. "It is enough that Father Laplante speaks for you. Also, we shall be very glad of the money. But wait! Before you go out again I must call my little daughter, Céleste!"

Although Delage liked children, he told himself that he was not in the mood, at that moment, to make small talk about dolls and kittens, and so he stood uncomfortably near the door while the patter of feet came down the stairs. Then he found himself blinking, and knew that his mouth was hanging foolishly open while he struggled to find something to say.

For this little daughter of Mme. Morin

was indeed small, but she was old enough to set the heads of all the young men spinning, and from the look in her eyes she would like nothing better than to do just that. They were as blue, those eyes, as Jean's own; and her hair was so black that it seemed like a blot of ink against the whitewashed wall of the kitchen.

At first she smiled mechanically, but after she had taken a second glance at that sturdy figure and determined face of the strange youth, she smiled until a little dimple grew in her cheek.

"*Monsieur*," she said, softly, "my mother tells me that you are coming to live with us for a time!"

"And I hope it may be a long time!" Jean exclaimed, fervently. "If I see you every day I shall not be able to remember that I have any troubles!"

"Troubles?" Céleste Morin echoed, and she laughed so that a dimple appeared in the other cheek. "How can a good-looking young man have troubles? It is the girls who suffer! *Mon Dieu!* No doubt you have broken hearts in every parish between Quebec and Baie St. Paul."

"Broken hearts? I?" he cried bitterly, although he did not feel nearly as heavy with sorrow as he had ten minutes before. "It is my heart that has been broken. What chance has a man against a girl?"

"Oh, I am so sorry!" she said, with a mist of sympathy dimming the brightness of her eyes. "Tell me about it, if you want to."

So for the next hour or more Jean told what a brute he had been, and how cruel was Marie Choquette. He related the tale there in the kitchen of his new home, while Mme. Morin found work to do in some other part of the house, and the good *soupe aux pois* came dangerously near to burning.

He talked, while Céleste listened with the greatest attention; and by supper time Jean was thoroughly convinced that a woman could do more than a priest to comfort the soul of a man in trouble.

With every day that passed after that, Jean Delage felt better; the spring came back into his step, and his chin was again held at that angle which indicates to all the world that the owner is ready for anything. Indeed, at the end of a week, Jean was able to tell Father Laplante that he thought he would be quite cured of his heartsickness before long; and also that he

was thinking of apologizing to Georges Painchaud, the young notary.

Father Sylvestre Laplante said nothing, although he did not appear to be ill pleased.

The intention of making peace with Georges Painchaud was really in the heart of Jean Delage. Now and then he met the notary on the street and silently regretted the cruelty of the battle he had fought under the eyes of Marie Choquette.

Of Marie, Jean thought more often than he liked to think, and always with a twinge of pain that was as hard to bear as the toothache. However, he was three-quarters intoxicated with the eyes and the dimples of Céleste Morin, and he persuaded himself that if she would marry him he would be able completely to forget the liquid brown depths of Marie's eyes, and the yellow curls which were forever falling out from under her cap.

This was the way affairs were shaping themselves when Jean came home to the *maison* Morin one afternoon and found M. Georges Painchaud seated in the little *salon*, a room to be used only on great occasions, with Céleste not so very far away from him.

Moreover, it was perfectly clear to Delage that neither of them was very much bored with the other. He choked as he stood in the doorway and glared at them, and all the wrath of that day in the woods came back to him.

"Again!" he growled at Painchaud. "I suppose I shall have to teach you another lesson!"

"*Messieurs!*" Céleste cried. "You must be friends with each other! Are you not both my friends?"

"Since when have you been a friend of this human mountain who does not know how to fight?" Jean demanded.

"And since when have you been appointed guardian for Mlle. Céleste?" Painchaud asked, pale with anger as he got to his feet.

"It is that the heart of M. Painchaud has been very heavy with sorrow," Céleste explained, nervously, "and I am trying to comfort him. He was introduced to me a few days ago at the house of a friend."

"You are a good comforter," Jean said, with a degree of sarcasm, "but this Painchaud cannot do the same thing to me twice."

"Nor can you do the same thing to me twice," the notary boomed. "When we

fight again it will be with something besides fists!"

Only for a moment did Jean try, on his part, to check the madness that was driving them both on. If this big Painchaud wanted to fight with weapons, then let it be so! He stepped nearer to his enemy and spoke from the depths of his throat.

"With knives or rifles," he said; "or, if you want to follow the ancient fashion, with pistols. It does not matter to me how, so long as I can take revenge for this second wrong you have done me."

A moan came from Céleste, her little hands pushing Delage back as if she were afraid he would leap at Painchaud then and there. The notary became pale, but it was clear that he had not been making an idle boast.

"To-morrow morning," he retorted grimly, "beyond the—"

"Stop!" Delage, having brushed Céleste aside, held up a warning hand and nodded toward her. "We must make our arrangements in secret. If you can force yourself to leave this charming young lady, we'll settle matters between ourselves."

"Georges!" Céleste cried, as Painchaud started to follow Delage out of the room. "Don't go! *Nom de Dieu!* Listen to me! Jean! This is a great sin—"

But already they were out of doors, their wrath cooled not at all by the crisp air of midwinter, nor could the sobs of Céleste Morin draw them back.

III

Two or three miles beyond the farthest house of Rivière des Chiens, the gray stone walls of what had once been a mill, stood in the depths of a ravine. Under the ice and snow a river ran as it had since men first came to *beau Canada*, but for longer than any one could remember the wheel of the mill had been dust, and the enormous grinding stones had remained silent and motionless. In summer the mill was a trysting place for lovers; in winter it knew no sound of human voices.

To this place, at dawn of the morning after the challenge, came Georges Painchaud and Jean Delage. They had got up while it was still dark, met without words beyond the village, and marched each with his own thoughts to this place agreed upon for the final settlement of their quarrel.

Together they clambered down to the basement of the ruined building, and once,

when Painchaud slipped, Jean very nearly put out a hand to help him. He drew it back quickly, making himself remember that he hated the man.

In one place above the basement the plank flooring still held together upon rotting beams. Underneath was a space quite clear of snow, where moccasins could find footing.

It had been the suggestion of Delage that they come here, for he knew the building well. What grim evidence of the duel remained would not be found until spring and the survivor would have months in which to take himself to another country.

The notary had chosen to fight with knives, and Delage had consented readily, although he knew that Painchaud was reputed to be very skillful with a blade in his hand. Jean wanted the fight to be fair; and Georges could neither shoot straight nor use his fists to advantage.

They faced each other in the clear, gray light that comes just before sunrise. Painchaud stamped, and his moccasins smacked the stone floor with a startling sound. He set himself, holding the wicked blade of a hunting knife on guard.

His mouth was set in hard lines, and he was pale, but in his bloodshot eyes there was no sign of wavering. It was as though he had to get this business of killing Delage over with as quickly as possible.

Now Jean Delage knew less of fear than most men, and it could not truthfully be said that he was afraid of death on this gray morning. He had as good a chance as Painchaud, and if the worst came it would soon be over.

It was not any great dread of the issue that made him hesitate, and dance lightly about as if to warm up for the attack, and take time to feel of the edge and point of his knife. He had begun to doubt whether he wanted to kill anybody, even Georges Painchaud.

"Come on!" The locked teeth of the notary parted for an instant. "If you don't come on I'll go and get you, you little rat!"

This was enough. Delage leaped, but this was a different matter from the battle of fists. Painchaud was cool, dealing with familiar weapons.

The blades met, and rang, and a spark struck out into the air. For a moment they hung together; then Delage gave ground, preparing for another attack. And

now that action had sent the blood dashing along his veins, he was ready to see the fight through.

A feint— The arm of Jean drawn back for a thrust.

Then he became motionless, blinking, and not at all sure he was not seeing an illusion which might cost him his life. For it seemed as though the form of Father Sylvestre Laplante stood there in the basement, between Delage and Painchaud.

The priest's arm was raised, and his face was stern.

Delage stepped backward uncertainly, but still on guard.

"This goes too far!" Father Laplante himself, and no illusion of the senses, thundered the words.

Painchaud fell back, too, but he did not put up his knife. The priest turned from one to the other, searching their faces with keen eyes.

"Twice he has come between me and a girl, *mon père!*" Jean said. "I do not want to kill him, but this is his way of fighting!"

"And twice he has come between me and a girl!" Painchaud echoed thickly. "Yes, and he has beaten me with his fists!"

Father Laplante lifted his voice and called out, without for an instant relaxing his vigilance.

"Marie Choquette! Come here and help me with these madmen!"

Scrambling down into the basement came Marie Choquette; panting, with a double handful of yellow curls falling over her brown eyes. Sure-footed as a cat, she landed upon the stones, and straight to Jean Delage went her gaze.

His heart seemed to turn over; not merely once, but a half dozen times. How had he ever been able to forget her, even for an hour at a time? Slender and vivid and full of witchery, she made these other village girls seem like tame tabbies.

"Marie!" he groaned hoarsely.

"Will you put up that knife?" She pointed with a sealskin mitten and her dark eyes promised him great reward. "Will you stop fighting, you brute?"

"Yes!" Jean cried. "Yes, Marie! Of course—if *you* want me to!"

The laugh of Georges Painchaud grated like a file upon the promise of Delage. He sneered, and took a menacing step forward.

"But I will not put up my knife for you, Marie! Nor for a priest, nor for any man or woman under the heavens! Does that heartbreaker think he can steal the love of all the women in the world, and live? I am going to kill him!"

"Céleste!" Father Laplante roared. "Céleste Morin! Come here; hurry, or you will lose a husband!"

The descent of Céleste was not so well done, and Jean felt his nose twitch in scorn of such awkwardness after the ease and grace of Marie Choquette. But Céleste Morin looked exceedingly small and helpless, and at sight of her Georges Painchaud's knife clattered to the stones. He sprang to help her up.

"My angel!" he cried, in a trembling voice. "Have you hurt yourself?"

"I think so!" Céleste gasped, faintly, as she clung to him. "I don't know yet! Don't kill him, Georges! I can't stand the sight of blood!"

"Of course not!" Painchaud promised, holding her upright with the greatest care. "I must take you home at once!"

Jean slowly sheathed his knife. Then he looked at Marie Choquette. He winked at her; and with a laugh he swept her into an embrace that would have done credit to a young bear.

Glancing over her shoulder, Delage saw Father Laplante take out a large silk handkerchief and wipe his forehead, although it was a very cold morning.

TEARS

"Now, don't you cry," my lover said.

"You must be gay with me instead.

I'm not a boat to float the years

On the sea of a woman's tears."

Shall I tell his new love not to cry,

Ever, ever, when he is by?

Or shall I just let her discover

One sure way to lose a lover?

Mella Russell McCallum

A Wayward Conceit

THIS LITTLE STORY OF MATRIMONIAL MISUNDERSTANDING
WILL BE EASILY UNDERSTOOD BY WIVES, AND IT
MAY ENLIGHTEN THE HUSBANDS

By Florence Clark

ISABEL fervently hoped that Caddie would finish her tea and go before her husband, the doctor, came home. She wished that she hadn't asked her old school chum up in the first place. But she scarcely could have done otherwise.

Coming into the warm glow of the entrance hall half an hour before, she had brushed past Caddie Armitage, who was hurrying from a dentist's office on the ground floor. They had gasped their astonished greetings.

She hadn't seen Caddie for five years—not since they had been at the Mount together. Carolyn Armitage had worn gold-rimmed glasses then, and her ash blond hair usually used to lie in drooping buns over her ears. The rest of the time the wads were coiled hard and tight so that Caddie's eyebrows were drawn outward, giving her a bland, Oriental expression.

Now, as she sat on the crimson sofa, a black velvet cushion back of her head, Isabel had a strange feeling that she had never seen her guest before. Caddie's hair lay in deep waves, and a glint of bright gold at the crest of each wave caught the high lights. Her frock was either Parisian made or an expensive copy, black and slinky with shimmering ripples that spread over the rich fabric of the sofa.

Isabel silently condemned her own damnable vanity, of course—asking Caddie up! She wanted her former school-mate to see that she had succeeded; that life had yielded her some of the things they had dreamed about when they were in the envious, just comfortably off set at school.

Isabel was glad that Caddie had chosen the sofa. It faced away from the French doors, and if Alfred came in he would pass on to his own room without being seen. It

was not likely that he would step into the library.

With a show of light-heartedness that she did not feel, she helped Caddie to recall the name of that absurd girl who used to stuff her mouth with hot potato at the Mount.

"Voss— Voos— Boos— Bass! Ah, that's it," she said. "Marietta Bass!"

How little Caddie and she had in common, after all! A few school memories—

The outer door slammed. Isabel speeded up the conversation and wondered if her tone betrayed her nervousness.

A swift shadow passed the silk curtains, and another door banged at the end of the long hall. She knew that Alfred had gone to his room, and that he would lie on the bed, coatless and sullen, until Greta, the maid, called him for dinner. She had known exactly what he would do, but she was greatly relieved when he had done it.

Isabel was sure that Caddie would not prolong her visit. In the first place, the impromptu tea had been arranged because Caddie was sailing for Europe that midnight on the newest floating wonder, the Lucia.

There were last minute odds and ends of packing to be done. Tooth paste and headache tablets, that you couldn't possibly get in Europe, had to be bought. Caddie's gray eyes were alight with happiness for the moment.

"Paris for a few weeks," she was saying, "and then on to Milan until spring. Mendoza is sending me to Toselli for lessons. He says that *he* can do nothing more with my voice. I need only to perfect my Italian, get a little experience, and then—" She shrugged her shoulders and smiled cryptically. "Who knows?"

She turned over a small onyx and diamond watch that hung from a slender gold chain around her neck. "Six o'clock?" She stared incredulously. "Where has the time gone? I must fly! You don't know how I've enjoyed seeing you, Isabel. It's been fine—talking over old times."

"I'm sorry you're not going to meet Alfred," her hostess dared to say. "He's probably on a case."

Isabel had an excited notion that she was setting the stage for Alfred to walk into the room. She could see his haggard cheeks and drooping shoulders—the desperate effort to be polite to her guest. But he did not come. Caddie was one woman friend who would not know!

Isabel's visitor stood before her, wrapped in a narrow black coat that boasted monkey fur from every edge.

"I'm glad you're happy, Isabel," she said simply; "you deserve it all."

II

WHEN the door closed Isabel went back to the tea table with its burden of gleaming silver that reflected the rosy lights. She picked up a small, sweet cake and nibbled it thoughtfully.

Caddie's lovely hair! Caddie's slim, straight figure!

She put the cake back on the plate guiltily and shook the crumbs from her fingers. She smiled.

How envious Caddie had looked when she had told her about the camping trip she and Alfred had taken in the Maine woods. Of course she had made it sound as if it had happened a few months ago. She had not been lying—exactly.

The camping trip was a beautiful five-year-old memory, but in the telling Isabel had lived over those happy nights under the stars in the pine-scented forest. She felt now as though she could not sit through dinner with Alfred, for she had captured a little of that far-off happiness, and wanted to hold it, if only for a few more hours.

The fact that Caddie didn't know made the illusion more real. Every one else knew. Any of her other friends would have suppressed a pitying smile if she had mentioned the camping trip. But Caddie had looked so satisfyingly deceived.

"Funny about old school friends," Isabel mused. "They turn out to be anything but what you expected."

Caddie going to Europe to study music!

There was Prue White, prim as her name, married to an adventurer! And rollicking Beth Streeter in a convent!

She, Isabel Baldwin, who, because of her social talents had always been asked to take shy newcomers to the Mount under her wing, now was the lonely wife of a successful physician who had no time at all for social affairs. Even if things had been different between them, he would not have had much time.

Rather than have her friends see how little Alfred cared, she had taken refuge in loneliness. She wanted them to think that her husband's free hours were too precious to share with others. Her friends had them in their thoughts for a time; and then, absorbed in their own affairs, they dropped away and ceased to speculate about the doings of the busy Dr. Mahland and his wife.

Isabel often took long bus rides alone, and sometimes she went unattended to the motion picture shows. One could sit in the darkness without feeling as though it were a confession of unpopularity.

People of her acquaintance dropped in there between shopping and dinner time. Whoever cared to think at all could assume that any number of Isabel's delightful plans had been pushed temporarily aside in order to catch a glimpse of a favorite screen star.

Then there was Tou-Mi, her Pekingese. Isabel used to saunter on the Drive with the smug little animal for hours.

It would have been indeed forlorn to walk alone, but the dog gave the impression that one might have other things to do but for the duty of exercising him.

Greta interrupted Isabel's rambling thoughts to take the tea things away.

"Doctor do not want any dinner. Do not want to be disturbed," she announced.

Isabel opened the drawer of a narrow satinwood table and took out a vanity case.

"Oh, yes," she said, as she rubbed the puff over her nose.

"Yes," she added, as though she were recalling the exact reason for the doctor's lack of appetite. "I am going out to dinner, too, Greta."

She did not meet the mournful eyes of the maid as she snapped the vanity case shut.

Isabel went slowly to the cupboard in the hall where old coats and second best felt hats were kept. The tweed coat seemed

FR
keep

narrower than ever as she tried to wrap it modishly about her as she had seen the slender Caddie do.

The comfortable felt hat, unlike her stylish new one with its upsweeping brim, hid her already graying hair. The loose gantlets she found in the pocket slipped on easily.

Her eyes rested on the closed door at the end of the hallway, and a pang of pity seized her. No dinner? Perhaps he was ill. No, she knew that he was not ill.

Tou-Mi had roused himself from a prostrate slumber and trotted questioningly to her.

"Not to-night, Funnyface!" Isabel said decisively, but the dog lingered hopefully, his wry face upturned and his pop eyes following every move.

The door that had been closed, opened, and suddenly Alfred stood before her. His thick, black hair was disordered, and he brushed it back with a white, sensitive hand, while he steadied himself sleepily against the door frame with the other. His body drooped, but his dark eyes were nervously alert.

Isabel wanted to go to him, to put her arms around him and plead with him to tell her what was wrong with their lives. Hundreds of times they had stood looking at each other in just this way. But the words never came.

Sometimes he would bend over and kiss her tenderly, impulsively. Even then she could not put into words the torturing questions that were in her heart.

"I am going out, Alfred," she said casually.

"Oh, are you?" he returned pleasantly, in the tone he might use in speaking to an influential patient with an imaginary illness.

"That coat?" he asked, raising his eyebrows. "What's the matter with your new coat?"

"It may snow to-night," she replied. "I— There's a tang in the air. Good night, Alfred."

"Wrap up your throat," he cautioned. "It's cold out."

He patted her shoulder. Then he said abruptly: "Good night!" and turned and went back into the bedroom.

III

FROM long practice, Isabel knew how to keep back tears. As she waited for the

elevator to rise she threw back her head and stood very still.

She knew that this would cause the anguished tears that had welled into her eyes to be again absorbed. Perhaps there was a drop or two that might be blotted with the corner of a handkerchief.

The air was frosty, and the sidewalks brittle. The tops of the tall buildings disappeared into a hazy sky, and across the river the electric signs were yellow smudges.

A moving sign that flashed the time every two minutes wound its endless way. The lights hesitated as if consulting a cosmic watch. "It is now—" The figures blurred, and the round of advertisements began again.

Lighted windows indicated comfortable family gatherings. Isabel could see in one ground floor apartment a mother and father seated at a dinner table with a half dozen boys and girls.

She decided against the bus. A picture show would not do either. Uncertainly she walked on while she turned over and over in her mind the assured fact that things were terribly, intangibly wrong between her husband and herself.

She scarcely knew where or how far she walked. At a junction she chose the brighter street, flanked with lighted shops. Diamond rings, silk stockings, locks and bolts, and dressmaker's supplies.

Here was a white tiled window with a golden brown chicken turning on a spit, and above the window the single word EAT. The place was crowded with taxi drivers and other weather-beaten men hunched over thick coffee cups.

Although it was really too cold for the usual crowd of loiterers, the window of the shop next door was surrounded by men, except for one old woman whose shoulder sagged from the weight of a heavy string shopping bag. She had paused on the edge of the circle and stood peering into the brightness.

Isabel slowed down and joined the group. Standing on her toes, she saw a half dozen tiny white puppies frolicking in a meadow of torn newspaper. They romped through a crazy game of tag or chewed one another's ears ecstatically, to the delight of the onlookers. Isabel forgot her troubles for a moment as she watched their gambols.

Beyond the glare of the window, boxes of dog food were arranged on shelves.

Among them was Tou-Mi's favorite brand, which caught her eye as she stirred to warm her numbing toes. She decided to thaw out against the long walk home by stepping into the store to buy a package.

A smock-clad man stepped from behind a pile of crates at the rear and greeted her cheerfully. A parrot in scarlet and yellow chattered high on a ring perch. Silent canaries shrank behind the bars of their tiny rough wooden cages.

A length of gray fur was stretched in a bench stall where it was half hidden in the straw. At the sound of Isabel's voice the sleeping form stirred, and then arose slowly to its haunches and looked steadily at her.

Then up, up, it went on unbelievably long legs until its strangely adorned head was even with her shoulder. The ears were a light silver in contrast to the slate tone of the coat, and they hung low with spiral curls like the prim coiffures of the daguerreotype period.

The curls swung rhythmically as the thing settled itself and stared insolently at her. It was at once repellent and fascinating. Nevertheless, she suddenly decided that she wanted this queer animal.

Isabel had never before in her life had a wayward conceit. She had never known the thrill of a reckless deed. She had never done what other women recollect indulgently as "funny things."

Now she stood tremblingly before a fantastic creature that she longed to own. She visioned herself in the public eye as the proud possessor of this half dog, half witch thing with its silver curls.

A row of whips displayed on the wall inspired her to fresh images wherein she held the center of a stage, a dominating figure with a lash that urged a spirited beast to do her will.

IV

SHE would show Alfred that she was not meek and futile. She would get a frock to match the dog—a fashion, she had read, that the smart Parisienne women affected. Two shades of gray— She would reduce! She would starve herself into slenderness.

"I'll take him," she said to the smiling proprietor.

If the man was surprised, he did not show it. One would think from his attitude that shabbily dressed, prosy looking little women frequently came in for a pack-

age of puppy biscuit and departed with a pedigreed dog.

"Will you take him with you?" he inquired, carefully avoiding the sordid subject of price. "You'll need a leash."

"Yes," she replied firmly, "a thick red leash and—and a whip. How much is he, did you say?"

It developed that the man was, after all, a mere hireling, with no authority to use his own judgment in the matter of accepting checks, particularly for the large amount of one hundred and fifty dollars.

Isabel rested her hand timidly on the dog's silver curls before she turned away. She put the white pasteboard card, on which was written the name of the shop, into her pocket and started on the long walk home.

A few white flakes were blowing as she turned northward. Of course, she reflected, she would have to get rid of Tou-Mi.

Not that she didn't still like the funny little thing—although he was stupid—very stupid. Two dogs would be impossible. He was tiny, and nearly always sleepy, but he made no demands. Any one would be glad to take him off her hands. A comfortable home—she would see that he got that.

A thin slippery blanket covered the streets as she trudged on.

Nothing more ridiculous than being sentimental about a Pekingese.

The snow now clung to the edges of her soles.

Stupid little thing that didn't distinguish one home from another as long as he was fed.

The snow was thick on her coat as she entered the familiar friendliness of the entrance hall, and her own library seemed a haven after her wanderings.

Alfred's door was open, so she knew he was not at home, but Tou-Mi pattered lazily over to the couch where she had curled up to await the tray which she had asked Greta to fetch her.

One arm hung wearily to the floor, and she raised it to stroke the Peke's brown head.

Suddenly she stopped.

If she were going to—well, get rid of Tou-Mi, it was rather silly to pat him and perhaps start thinking of the lonely hours they had passed together.

She drew her hand away and then laughed merrily.

"This takes the—the blue ribbon," she murmured. "According to my conscience I'm not to pat you, Tou-Mi, because I'm giving you—what do they call it?—the gate. That's it! The gate!"

She laughed half hysterically now.

Tou-Mi blinked knowingly, and she stretched out her hand and stroked his head.

When Greta came with the tea, hot and weak as Isabel had requested it, she found her mistress asleep, her face hidden in the crook of her arm as though she had been crying. Accustomed to strange doings in a brooding household, the maid returned quietly to the kitchen.

V

THE slam of a door awakened Isabel. She sat up and opened her eyes to see a shadow pass the curtains.

Then another door slammed and she knew that Alfred was in his room. She arose unsteadily and went to the closed door. This time she did not hesitate.

She walked over to where her husband sat in a low chair. His face was in his hands, and he did not move when she sank to her knees by his side.

"I know now, Alfred," she said chokingly.

And then she threw back her head so that the tears would once more be absorbed into her brown eyes.

"I know about her," she went on in a firm voice. "I've never wanted to believe it, but now I see that I'm a funny little thing—something like a—a little brown dog. And you yearned to be master of

something more impressive—spirited—dangerous—"

He did not move. His face was still hidden by his hands, and she could see only the thick black hair waving back from his forehead.

"I'll go away, Alfred. I understand now! I've been blind and—oh, how unhappy it has been for you!"

It was harder to keep back the tears, now, and she stirred as if to take flight.

His arms went around her.

"No," he said thickly. "Don't go, Isabel. I need you. We'll run off together somewhere right away, and then, later on in the spring—the blessed woods. We'll forget all this. I, not you, have been the fool—but I'll make it all up to you."

His lean body trembled, and it was with a great, brave effort he managed to get the words out. But, as if to make his penitence complete, he forced himself to the ordeal.

"She sailed for Europe—on the Lucia—at midnight!" he confessed brokenly.

So Caddie's visit had not been by chance.

They were silent for a time, and Alfred stroked the hand that rested on his knee.

"Shall I tell you more, Isabel?" he asked.

"No," she answered calmly. "There is no past; only a future."

In her hour of renewed happiness an inconsequential thought came to Isabel. The white card—the dog man's address—was in the pocket of her old coat. Mentally, she tore it to shreds and cast the pieces out of the window to flutter with the fast falling snowflakes.

THE LOST WORD

THERE was in my heart to-day
Something exquisite to say,
Fluttering like a darkling bird
Vainly trying to be heard,
Stirring like a prisoned rose,
Like a waif of music strayed
In corridors where no one goes.

All life's sweetness past the telling
Seemed within my heart up-welling,
Suing softly to be said
In one lovely perfect word;
Yet in vain I tried to free
What my heart would say to me.

Richard Le Gallienne

Cheats

HONESTY, LIKE ANY OTHER HABIT, IS HARD TO BREAK AFTER
A LIFETIME OF INDULGENCE IN THIS LUXURY
OF THE CONSCIENCE

By William E. Kerry

WHEN Henry Okey found a gold globule at the bottom of the crucible which he had used in assaying a sample of old Pete Cartier's quartz, he exhibited no sign of elation.

There was no trembling of his withered hand as he adjusted his delicately balanced, glass-inclosed scale, and manipulated the rider until the gold on one pan and the tiny weights on the other were in perfect alignment.

Quartz which has a value of about four hundred dollars a ton is high grade; but if old Cartier had struck a bonanza, and evidently he had, Okey wasn't going to jabber about it to anybody—not even to Cartier himself, in fact.

Henry Okey had been preparing for this exact circumstance through a very long period.

Thirty years before, the hurrying feet of men gone mad with the lust of gold had trampled through the gulches and over the mountains of Sundial. With brawny arms the fortune seekers had assaulted the flinty hills; they had torn away the surface in a thousand places, and driven their steel to the shank in the living rock.

Friable porphyry and iron-mailed granite, mixed with a sprinkling of glittering quartz, had been spewed forth by the go-phering toilers; much yellow gold had been riven from the resisting rocks. And then the hectic flame of Sundial had died down to darkness, for the golden fuel that fed it was mostly spent.

Once in awhile, however, through the years that followed, some of the grizzled ones who lingered in Sundial would make a new strike. For a time the flame would flare again; an ember would glow among the ashes.

It was such a discovery that old Pete Cartier had made somewhere out in the eternal mountains which had watched, with immobile visage, the sweeping drama of Sundial.

Okey had carefully pocketed the little button of gold, and was making preparations to close his littered office for the day, when the door opened and an old man came into the room. His face was as wrinkled as the hills, as brown as weathered porphyry; his back was bent as though, like outworn timbers that give under the pressure of heavy ground, he was shouldering a burden too great for him.

Yet there was an expectant, hopeful look in his faded blue eyes as they viewed the glowing furnace. He looked at Okey, asking a mute question.

"Nothin' doin', Pete," the assayer said, turning his back to the old man. "Nary a trace."

The disappointment of Cartier was apparent. His brow furrowed. Only the note of impatience in his voice saved it from a tone of discouragement, if not downright tragedy.

"An' I thought I hed it shore this time," he remarked. "It was thet rose quartz, all rotten like, thet they found on the surface o' the Murphy. I shore thought thet this time—" He shook his head, and his voice faded away.

"Jes' 'cause it was rose quartz don't prove an'thing," Okey argued. "Sometimes it's rich, an' sometimes it don't carry no more values than ole tomato cans."

"Thet's so—thet's so. Ye never kin tell 'bout it," Cartier admitted, dolefully. "Wal, thet's no use stayin' round hyar any longer. I reckon I'll run 'long home."

Okey, however, sought to delay him.

"Course it's funny," he said; "findin' a new croppin' o' that kind o' quartz round this camp when people's a been huntin' it fer over thirty year, now. Where'd ye run across it, Pete?"

He kept his back turned to hide the avaricious gleam in his eyes. It would be important—highly important—to learn where Pete Cartier had found the gold.

"Okey," the older man replied, "I'm so plumb busted up that I don't never keer to talk 'bout it. I thought shore I hed struck it at last. I jes' don't keer to talk 'bout it, never; no, sir."

He pulled his dusty cap down over his discouraged eyes and shuffled out of the office.

II

HEN OKEY watched the bent figure move slowly up the wooden walk and turn down the trail that led to his cabin, and from the dusty window he saw the door of the shack open and the slim figure of a girl come out into the late afternoon sunlight.

"Wonder ef he'll mention it to her," he said, half aloud. "Don't ever want to talk about it, eh?"

He fingered in his pocket and brought forth the little globule of gold, and looked it over as it rested in the palm of his hand. It had happened at last. He knew it would, if he waited long enough.

But where did it come from? Well, he could wait a little longer to find out, if necessary. Like most folks, Pete Cartier had his garrulous moments.

For nearly half a century Henry Okey had spent his energy in seeking a fortune about mining camps. He had known Virginia City, Leadville, the Black Hills, Cripple Creek, and Goldfield. He had toiled beside men who had made fortunes overnight, but Okey himself had never made a strike.

He and Pete Cartier had been partners for years. They had come to Sundial together when the camp was in its heyday, and together they had hung on through the dragging decades.

Okey had been something of a chemist before fortune had lured him away from the cities, and when Sundial was in its peetering out stage, and he felt too old to take up the trail again, he had opened a little assay office. By means of it he had eked out a living—an existence that never satisfied him.

Once in a great while he would fare forth into the hills on a prospecting trip; the old flame still burned intermittently. And it was fanned when every now and then some old crony uncovered a cropping overlooked in the old days—a prospect that meant a quick and easy fortune.

Life had been disappointing to Okey. In the loneliness of his little office he had long brooded over the injustice of the dispensations of fortune. Of late he had become more bitter, and something of a recluse.

With monotonous regularity one or another of the old-timers in Sundial would make a strike, and the mountains would see the last of him. Chris Carlson had gone back to his beloved Sweden. Nick Capriano had returned to Italy to live in the sunshine for the rest of his life. Old Tom Spencer was in Denver, enjoying comfort and plenty.

And he, Okey, had assayed their samples, had told them the value of the ore they had stumbled upon so stupidly. If he had not told them that their samples carried gold, or—better still—if he had been emphatic in stating that they did *not* carry even a trace of value, they would have abandoned their claims.

They would have forgotten them, likely, and Okey, after the proper lapse of time, could have learned their location and staked them for himself. Of course there might have been some trouble over such an affair; but more and more, as he grew old, Henry Okey was noticing that money exerted an almost unbelievable influence on human turbulence.

Such, then, were the thoughts of Okey, the recluse—thoughts engendered by a lifetime of failure and disappointment. And three years before he had arrived at a decision: The very next time he assayed bonanza ore he would keep the secret to himself, and eventually profit by it.

Why not? Riches came usually by luck or sharp practice. A life of toil had netted him little.

Too bad, of course, that his old partner, Pete Cartier, had to be the one to make the strike. He felt qualms that would have been totally absent if it had been any one else; but, then, he and Pete had drifted away from each other during the last few years.

Pete's granddaughter had been as big a cause as any other, inspiring the aged for-

tune seeker to go on prospecting, keeping him optimistic, furnishing an incentive. The soul of Okey had shriveled while that of old Pete flourished.

Okey and Cartier had become unsympathetic toward each other, restless and irritable when they were together. No real trouble happened between them, just different points of view, beckoning along different paths.

Okey, his mind full of scheming, had the greater animus. In fact, Cartier felt merely a futile sorrow as he reached his cabin to be greeted by the slender girl.

"Supper's all ready, granddad," she told him. "Just sit right down and start eating while I put the coffee on."

"Thar wa'n't a trace in them samples, Myrtle," he said. "Not a trace."

"Well, cheer up, granddad," the girl urged. "We're no worse off to-day than we were yesterday. I wish you wouldn't be always trying to strike it rich, and then being disappointed when you don't do it. I don't need money to be happy, and I'll bet if it weren't for me, you'd never bother one bit about hunting for gold."

The old man did not reply for a moment, but then he asserted himself almost fiercely.

"Don't ye worry, honey. I'll strike it yet."

"But I'm not worrying," his granddaughter argued. "Honest, I don't care whether you strike it or not."

III

DEEP down in her heart, though, Myrtle Cartier was disappointed. She was bored with teaching in the little Arapahoe school-house.

She felt now that her words lacked conviction. Perhaps Pete Cartier felt it—maybe her words rang as false to him as they did to her own ears.

"Money wouldn't make any difference to me," she repeated. "We would go on living here exactly the same in this little old cabin. Do you think I would ever leave these mountains and you just because we happened to get a little money? I'm afraid you don't quite know me, granddad."

Old Pete looked at her affectionately. He did not believe her, but his heart glowed at her loyalty.

"Why, if you struck a vein six feet wide of solid sylvanite, like you have in your collection, it wouldn't make a bit of

difference," the girl went on. She believed that argumentative points should be made emphatic to the aged.

Pete poured his coffee into his saucer. For a moment there was no sound except the windy suspirations as he drew the steaming beverage into his mouth. He sucked at his mustache, and looked up.

"Sylvanite?" he said. "Myrt, thet reminds me, honey. 'Member me a tellin' ye o' thet dude feller I met down to Hen Okey's office?"

Myrtle Cartier blushed faintly. "I—I think so," she replied.

Old Pete drew in another mouthful of coffee, and turned to look reminiscently at his specimen case against the wall.

"What about that—that dude fellow, granddad?" Myrtle asked.

"He's from Tin Cup," Pete explained. "Thet is, he don't hail from thar reg'lar, but he's been workin' thar. Been at one o' them newfangled schools o' minin'," he added, with mild contempt. "Yore mentionin' sylvanite reminded me. We was talkin', him an' me, an' he was wantin' to come up an' see my specimens."

"Oh, yes! I should think they would be educational for him."

The girl's gentian blue eyes were bright with interest. She had seen the "dude feller" in the general store a couple of times. She smiled to herself.

He would be adroit enough, probably, to make the proper inquiries, to scrape acquaintance with her credulous grandfather, and use the specimens as an excuse for coming up to the cabin and meeting her. She smiled again.

"Was he coming to-night?" she asked.

"Aye, to-night." The "credulous" Pete hid a flash of amusement in his own age-dimmed eyes. He surmised that the girl had already seen this likely looking lad.

They sat there, youth and age, seeking harmlessly to fool each other; youth, as usual, confident of its guile; age, more experienced, and hence more humble, willing to pose as none too keen.

"I'll just slick up the cabin a little," Myrtle said.

"Aye, thar'll be time enough, I reckon. At eight, he sez, he'll be droppin' in."

IV

It was a full half hour before eight, however, when Kenneth Marvin dropped in.

His interest in the specimens lagged when he met the old prospector's granddaughter. Yet there was subtlety about him. He turned with an appearance of real concentration to the ores displayed in the old-fashioned glass-doored china closet.

Myrtle stood near him as old Pete proudly displayed piece after piece. There was a refreshed interest for her in the collection.

Together, she and young Mr. Marvin bent over and peered at the odd-looking minerals. Once their hands touched.

And despite his thrill at being beside the girl, Marvin was gradually fascinated by the collection. Here were samples of ores, rich in treasures of nature, for which men had laid down their lives, for which women had bartered their souls. Here was luxury, glory, debasement, in the first crude state of evolution.

There was sylvanite from Cripple Creek—an argentiferous ore which, heated over a hot flame, would bubble with golden globules. There was black carbonate of lead from Virginia City and Leadville—lead that was rich in silver—and white quartz from Goldfield, which, when broken, would reveal little wires and leaves of native gold.

There were great pieces of green malachite and blue azurite, copper specimens prized chiefly for their iridescent beauty. Here was a piece of wood as hard as steel. It was two inches thick, but before the pressure had started, it had been a fourteen inch cap on a timber set.

Kenneth Marvin appeared to appreciate the display. The West was epitomized in this rickety cabinet.

Of real interest, too, were the willing tales of the old man—recitals of riotous days in Virginia City, where there was a cemetery, a plot of unconsecrated ground, for those stormy souls who "died with their boots on."

Marvin heard of the great day when General Grant passed through Leadville; he heard of Cripple Creek, Aspen, Creed, Deadwood, and other camps where the reckless spirits of the Old West had gathered; tales of the Cœur d'Alenes, California, Oregon.

And through it all he sensed the indomitable spirit of old Pete Cartier, and felt the presence of the girl. It was an evening of high romance for Kenneth Marvin.

"I like it up here, Mr. Cartier," he said, naively.

"Mister! Eh?" The old prospector's scraggy white mustache curled. "Pete, my boy—Pete Cartier. It's a name thet's been called in many's a gold camp, lad."

"And yet he thinks I want to get out of the mountains with that heritage behind me," Myrtle offered. "Granddad's determined to make a strike so that I can go. I don't think it's nice of him to want me to leave him."

"It's poor judgment, anyhow," was Kenneth's gallant return. "And I don't know any place you would find more interesting. They call me, too, somehow, these mountains. I'm not native here. I'm more than that. Being born here would have been just an accident. I came to the mountains. It was choice on my part."

"Ye ain't a lunger?" Old Pete was unschooled in tactful conversation.

Marvin smiled tolerantly, conscious of the girl's embarrassment.

"No, I've got a strong pair of lungs. It's work with me, the same as you, Mr.—well, Pete. I happen to have connections with people who have money to invest. If you hear of any promising property open for a figure—well, we might get together."

"Thet's the way it goes," the old man sighed, after Marvin had left. "Here's a man a-tryin' to hand me money, an' I ain't got a claim thet's worth an ole tomato can. I was a-hopin' when I toted them specimens into Hen Okey's office—"

"Come, granddad," the girl urged. "Don't worry about it. It's bedtime."

"Aye," was the weary answer. "Bedtime. But I was shore a-thinkin'—"

"Good night, granddad," the girl soothed.

She lit the bracket lamp in the old man's room, and, kissing him fondly, glided into her own crude little chamber. Somehow there was a queer tenderness in her heart to-night.

She found slumber unattractive, arose, and silently slipped out on the little gallery of the cabin, to gaze with strange thoughts at the blaze of sidereal fire overhead. "Asleep, granddad?" she called softly. There was no answer.

V

OLD Pete Cartier was not asleep. Temptation was whispering to him this night.

He lay in his narrow bed, while his thoughts raced wildly through a dozen boom camps of the irretrievable past.

Gamblers had cleaned up, so had thieves and tricksters. Himself— It would not be long now before the earth that had been his plaything would possess him forever. And the girl?

This young Easterner, now. Nice enough fellow, but a little too fine spoken, too dudish, according to Virginia City standards.

Now, if he could salt one of his properties and sell it to the Easterner. After all, it would not be the lad's money. "Connections with people who had money to invest," the stranger had said.

Pete's old eyes stared into the wall of darkness. Couldn't he take some of that Goldfield quartz in the cabinet and plant it in the worthless claim upon which he had based hopes so great?

The ore already had the appearance of being rich. A little free gold judiciously introduced into it would make him rich himself. The young fellow would buy the claim, and then, too late, find out that it was not worth anything.

Nothing could be proved against him. And young Marvin was no particular friend of his, and Boston, or wherever he hailed from, had more than its share of money, anyhow.

Why not? There was something coming to him for the long years of toil he had done in the hills. There should be something left for Myrtle.

He was ashamed of his thoughts when, next morning, he glimpsed the sun peeking up over the crest of Old Baldy. The shame gave place to further scheming thoughts again that night.

Some strange poison had seeped into the soul of old Pete Cartier. Corrosion was gradually taking place as the weeks slid by, and in the interim Kenneth Marvin manufactured many excuses to ride over from Tin Cup and spend the evening in Sundial.

Myrtle Cartier liked him, and gradually confessed her yearning to see the world; to go somewhere, anywhere, that held new faces, new scenes. Old Pete often dozed by the fireplace, or so it seemed to the young folks.

What he heard convinced him that now he was justified in salting his claim. He would make the bait tempting for the bite that was sure to come.

"It's coming to you, to see the wide world," Marvin told Myrtle one evening as

the veteran slumped in his chair before the whitening coals. "Now, if your grandfather should strike it rich one of these days, or if I—"

He halted uncertainly. A tide of color arose in Myrtle's face.

Old Pete looked up sleepily, took the pipe out of his mouth, stroked his snowy mustache with the stem of it, opened his mouth to speak, and closed it again. Then, with a do-or-die gleam in the faded old eyes, he announced:

"I've plumb struck it, boy! Been keepin' it a secret a few days. Some folks a comin' up hyar to look it over, to buy it, I reckon."

"But how about my people?" Marvin demanded. "Don't you remember that I asked for a look-in the first night I was up here? Folks I'm in with have money—plenty of it."

Myrtle's face was radiant. A strike at last! Her heart thumped. Her grandfather would be secure in his final years, and Kenneth in a position to cooperate with him.

"Oh, when can he see it, granddad?" she asked.

"I'll show it to ye to-morrer," Pete replied. He directed his conversation to Marvin. No use hauling Myrtle into a deal like this, making her a party to it.

"Ef it proves up," he continued, "I reckon ye kin make an offer ef ye've a mind to. No forcin' o' ye," he added, almost fiercely. "Ye don't look to me like a feller as 'ud squawk ef ye made a mistake."

He took his lamp and shuffled to the protecting walls of his own room. Fifty years and more on the square, and now a salter of mines!

He slept fitfully that night.

VI

PETE CARTIER and Kenneth Marvin rode out to the claim next day. Old Pete wished that Marvin wouldn't talk so hopelessly. It hurt him. He wished, also, that the whole business was over with.

"Reckon we cain't make it back to-night," he fretted. "Ye used to makin' camp?"

Kenneth smiled boyishly. "Don't worry about me, Pete," he said in his friendly manner. "I've camped out quite a good deal. It gives me a thrill to think I'm going to be out here to-night, under the stars,

with a man that's known the trail as you have. We'll be buddies, Pete.

"The last buddy I had—he's still over in France," he added, gently. "I haven't had a buddy since he went West, Pete."

Old Cartier refused to be sentimental, although his soft old nature cried out for friendship. He felt like a sheep-killing dog. But there was Myrtle to consider.

"Make yer tests," he ordered, sullenly. "Then make yer offer—er don't—after ye have the stuff assayed over at Hen Okey's."

Kenneth Marvin looked over the claim with a keen eye. If it had been rich before, it was more so now.

Old Pete watched the young man furtively. Several days before, he had taken some of his Goldfield quartz, broken it into fragments, and scattered it over the cut he had made on the ledge.

"It looks real to me," Kenneth said. "I'll tell you, Pete. It's the gamble in this business that appeals to me as much as anything. The folks back of me have plenty of money. They can afford to take a chance, and furthermore, I think I know real stuff when I see it. I think I told you about my course at the School of Mines?"

"Yep," Pete replied. "Wal, hyar's a chanst to gamble all that eddication. What's yer gamble?"

Marvin squinted at the piece of quartz cupped in his hand. "If I had this assayed first," he explained, "it might cost me more than I had planned to pay. If it turned out real high grade, we'd only be haggling back and forth. Maybe I'd try to cheat you, Pete," he added, flippantly.

Old Pete winced.

"I'll tell you what I'm willing to do," Marvin continued. "The whole game's a gamble. Suppose I offer you right now five thousand dollars for a half interest."

"I'd take seven fer the hull thing."

"Then I offer it. Seven thousand dollars in cash as soon as we double back to Sundial. It's a deal, and it goes. For better or worse. Shake, Pete."

Old Cartier's handclasp was woefully flabby. He felt that he was earning his money, after all, in mental anguish.

"I'd a leetle ruther ye'd take the sample over to Hen Okey's office," he said, virtuously, "an' git a report on't. Howsom-ever, do as ye've a mind to."

"I've a mind to go through with my original proposition," was Marvin's prompt reply. "And now I'll show you what a

cook I am. How'd bacon and eggs go? And I'll beat up some biscuits, and you can put on the coffee pot, and my pouch is full of good tobacco, that kind from Denver that you said you liked. This experience makes me feel like a real old prospector, Pete."

The odd pair slept under the stars—old Pete restlessly—made a satisfactory breakfast of bacon, flapjacks, and coffee, and were back in Sundial by the middle of the afternoon, and in Henry Okey's office before it closed.

"I'd feel better," Pete had said. "I want my own opinion sorter backed up with a reg'lar test."

"Suits me," had been Marvin's perfunctory consent. "Here's a check for seven thousand. Take that to the Sundial Bank in the morning. You'll find they'll pay out the money without a whimper. I'd keep the cash in the bank, though, Pete. That cabin could be broken into easily. There's still some rough ones around—and there's Myrtle, you know."

Pete merely nodded his head. He was thinking. On Hen Okey's report, Marvin and his backers would lose far more than seven thousand. Believing themselves to have a bonanza, they would go to considerable expense in developing the mine. It was a raw deal all around.

VII

MARVIN seemed jubilant that he was finally in possession of a claim that appeared a good one.

"Tell you what we'll do, Pete," he suggested. "I've been your guest a good deal. Why not return the compliment? The Sundial Hotel puts up a fair meal—sometimes. How about you and Myrtle joining me there for dinner—that is, for supper—this evening? I'll be leaving early. Riding over to Tin Cup to-night."

Old Pete looked up guiltily.

"I'm a leetle off'n my feed," he parried. "Some other time, mebbe."

"Sorry. Hope you feel better when I see you again. I'll be back in a day or two, and I'll tell you, Pete—if I strike it rich with that claim I'll treat you right."

"I been treated right enough," old Pete returned. "What ye paid me is right enough. I don't want no more—whether ye make a fortune or whether ye don't make a cent. As ye say, thar's risk in this business. 'Tain't yer fault ef ye make a

fortune. 'Tain't my fault ef ye make nothin'—now, is it?"

"Of course not."

"Then good night to ye, boy."

He trod wearily along the trail to his cabin, to find that Myrtle had not returned from her visit to a neighbor's home, where she had spent the night in the absence of her grandfather.

Old Pete planned to wait for her, then decided that he was very tired, and dragged himself off to bed. He would be awake when she came in—no doubt about that. Old Pete Cartier was paying for his perfidy.

He remained in bed most of the next day, the first morning in years that he had not seen the rising sun topping Old Baldy.

"You ought to stay there if you don't feel well, granddad," Myrtle had cautioned. "Why not let me make some nice soup, and bring it in?"

"I been off'n my feed, thet's all," Pete protested. "I expect it 'ud be better I waited fer supper. I'll jes' step down to Hen Okey's office meantime."

"Evenin', Hen," he greeted the assayer, a few minutes later.

"Evenin'," Henry responded.

"Hen," old Cartier quavered, "what all's been the matter o' ye the pas' few months? Ye been actin' onfrien'ly, like."

"I be all right," Henry replied, coldly.

"But we was pardners, long ago," Pete insisted. "Lor', Hen, we're gittin' along—gittin' along a mighty ways. I remembers the time we was in Cripple Creek together. Coupla young bulls we was then, eh, Hen?"

"We was, all right," Henry conceded.

"I was a thinkin' t'other day o' the time the gas got me. An' ye got me to the level o' the shaft, Hen. I swore then thet if good luck ever came my way it 'ud be good luck fer my pardner, too. Didn't I say that, Hen?"

"I disremember," said Henry, who refused to reminisce along sentimental lines. "Ye don't owe me nuthin' fer that little turn. It was only a-payin' ye back fer that trick ye turned in Creed—the time ye come back an' dragged me out o' the head-in' when the rock sluffed on me after I teched off'n the fuses."

He brought himself up with a jerk. Damn sentiment!

"But them times is all past, Pete," he concluded. "Them things don't mean much—now."

Unlike Pete, he did not reaffirm his own declaration of years before to share and share alike after the big strike that seemed sure to come—some day. Selfishness had claimed him.

He wanted no half interest in any claim. Old Pete had never come through with the location of the property that had been pronounced valueless; but he, Okey, would keep pumping him from time to time.

He had been deprived of what he believed his just dues for so long that he wanted everything or nothing. Misfortune molds some men into this cast of mind.

"But I was a leadin' up to somethin'," Pete argued. "Say, Hen, ye assayed thet sample o' young Marvin's, I reckon?"

"Aye," Okey replied. "Thar was nary a trace, Pete. Nary a trace. Didn't say whar he located them samples, did he?"

But Pete was on his feet. Okey's report had fairly nonplused him.

"Nary a trace!" he repeated. "Nary a trace! Why, I— Why, thar must be. I tells ye, I—"

He remembered just in time before he betrayed himself. Something was mighty wrong somewhere.

VIII

THE shaky old door rattled.

"Howdy, folks," rang the cheery voice of Kenneth Marvin. "Myrtle and I thought we'd walk over for the report on those samples."

"I just feel that it's going to be a sensation in this country," Myrtle declared excitedly.

Old Okey turned toward Marvin.

"I was jes' a tellin' Pete," he said, "thet thar was nary a trace in them samples. They was interestin' lookin', though."

"What a pity!" Myrtle exclaimed forlornly. "But remember, Ken, you're not doing business with any stranger, but with my honest old granddad, Pete Cartier. In that case you'll return the money, won't you, granddad?"

Old Pete was silent. In his breast were several conflicting emotions. "Honest old granddad!"

Well, he had been honest all his life. Even now he was not cheating for himself; he would not touch the seven thousand dollars.

But it might be best to return the money, to get out from under this all-around crooked deal. How it had shocked him

when he found that Hen Okey had stooped to dishonesty in his assay! Maybe Hen, too, had been weakened by misfortune, years of dreariness.

This Marvin fellow was a manly lad; he should not have taken his money. And yet there was Myrtle—but would she want money that was tainted?

He weighed all the conflicting values in his mind, and honesty won. He would admit his perfidy—but not in front of Myrtle.

"Myrt," he said, "would ye mind a steppin' outside fer a minnit er so? I wanta talk over a leetle private bus'ness with these men."

Myrtle obediently turned and walked from the office.

"Now," old Pete said bravely, when she had gone, "I gotta announcement to make. I'll hev to confess—"

Kenneth Marvin strode suddenly to the middle of the little assay office.

"Wait a minute," he commanded. "Okey, you made a 'mistaken' report on the samples from Pete's claim. You two old codgers thought I went to Tin Cup last night, but I went to Denver, instead, for an assay. My original belief was confirmed—the ore is high grade. The trouble with you, Okey, is that you've lived straight for half a century! When folks your age—and Pete's—try to turn crooked, they only cheat themselves."

Old Cartier had a hangdog air. The young fellow had said: "—and Pete's—" Did he know that Cartier also had stooped to trickery?

"I'll tell ye, Ken—" he stammered.

"Keep quiet, Pete," Marvin commanded, in an affectionate severity. "Have you anything to say, Okey?"

"Ye can't take no legal action," was Hen Okey's defense. "I was puzzled like with the last samples. Seemed thar was free gold in 'em somehow, an' it put me off the track."

Old Pete once more felt a flush of shame over his reckless attempt at mine salting.

"Can't take action?" Kenneth Marvin repeated, sternly. "I can—and I will! Pete Cartier, you are going to suffer a severe loss for being so stupid."

He smiled tolerantly, then; but the aged schemers identified this as a sardonic grin, and began to shake in their boots.

"You have had Myrtle for nineteen years," the young man resumed, "and now I'm going to take her away from you!"

"Why—why—" Cartier began stumbly.

"And you will be compelled to accept a half interest in the mining claim!" Marvin calmly interrupted. "It 'll make you rich."

Old Pete rocked back and forth for a few moments, getting his bearings. Then he turned triumphantly to Hen Okey, and exclaimed:

"Ye wall-eyed horned toad! Take one-half o' my half, er I'll never cuss ye out agin as long as I live! Thet's final!"

"D'ye m-mean—" Okey stammered.

"Get out of here, both of you!" Kenneth commanded. "And tell Myrtle to come in."

IX

PETE and Hen, dazed by the forcefulness of this young dude, shuffled out.

"My granddad tells me you—you have very bad news for—for me, personally!" the girl said, falteringly, as she entered the office.

It was Marvin's turn to teeter uncertainly on his feet, but he swiftly recovered from the sly blow that the aged joker had dealt him. He managed a laugh that sounded light-hearted, and stepped closer to the unsuspecting new heiress.

"Things have been a bit irregular," he explained, vaguely. "Something mysterious happened to your granddad's samples, but those that I took from another part of the claim tested high grade. By a series of chance happenings he and Okey own half the mine."

"Then where's the bad news?" Myrtle Cartier inquired, smiling back relievedly as he grinned down at her.

"It's this!" the young man announced, nervously. "I'm afraid you'll think I'm after Pete's money if I ask you to—to marry me!"

The girl continued to gaze up into his eyes. A flicker of amusement made dimples about her mouth.

"If I should say 'Yes,'" she countered, "you might suspect that I was mercenary, too! You own half the claim, you know."

"There's only one way to settle this problem," Kenneth declared, and suddenly drew her into his arms. She tried to hide her face on his shoulder, but he found her lips.

"Am I after Pete's money?" he demanded, smilingly.

"N-no!" she gasped, and snuggled closer. Then she kissed him.

"Am I mercenary?" Myrtle inquired in a whisper.

"Sweetheart!" Kenneth murmured, and it appeared to be a satisfactory reply.

Outside could be heard the drone of aged

voices, the sound of a slap on the back, the cackle of toothless laughter.

Pete Cartier and Hen Okey, known in many a boom camp of the old West as "pardners," were reunited. They knew, moreover, that another life partnership was being formed inside the office door.

A Knight of the Wild

HERE IS THAT BLITHE WARRIOR, THE GREAT GRAY BOAR,
WHOSE HOME IS THE JUNGLE FASTNESSES OF INDIA

By Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Casserly

ON a narrow bamboo platform, lifted high on its four spidery posts out of the field of green growing crops, lay a huddled bundle of rags. It stirred uneasily when, as the dawn whitened the sky, from a similar platform in the next field came a cry.

At a louder call the bundle heaved, and from under a torn and dirty blanket the tousled head of a young Hindu boy poked out. He blinked and yawned, and as the light grew stronger, and the shouts from the more wakeful watchers of the cultivation around rang louder, he sat up reluctantly and looked about him.

The blades of the growing grain were agitated wildly in one corner of his field, although there was no breath of air to stir them. This caught the lad's eye, and he sprang to his feet, shrieking as shrilly as his neighbors. From a sling he sent several hard clay balls hurtling into the waving green.

Then out of the cover wherein they had been feasting royally burst a half dozen squat, dark-hided animals which, with the stiff action of nursery rocking horses, bounded off on short legs over the stubbly yellow grass of an untilled stretch. It was a sounder, that is, a family group of wild pigs.

They had come down in the night from the low, rocky hill to which they were now retreating, to steal the scanty crops of the poor cultivators who tilled the stony soil

around this Central Indian village which now was becoming visible as the pale sky turned to rose at the coming of the sun.

To the wild chorus of the night watchers the little band of thieves disappeared in the scattered thorny scrub. At their head lumbered a stout old gray boar, well over three feet high at the shoulder, with long, sharp tusks curving up from his jaws to his wicked little eyes. Behind him came three heavy old sows, a young one light and active, and a male not half grown toiling wearily behind its elders, its young strength nearly exhausted.

In and out among the big rocks on the hillside they went, the leader setting a slower pace to enable the tired youngster to catch up. There was no need to hurry, now, for the unarmed peasants could not pursue or harm these robbers of their fields, and were forced to be content with driving them away.

And so, at their leisure, the whole sounder returned to their fastness on the stony hill, where they were greeted by the rest of their family group, nursing mothers with their offspring, quaint piglets of a dirty, whitish brown color. And from other directions several parties, coming back from undisturbed raids on other fields, climbed up at their ease.

On this hilltop there was a small colony of wild boars and their families. Down in the villages of the plain below, their domesticated cousins lived in squalor, rooted

in garbage, and, mixed up with the mangy pariah dogs, lay about the dirty lanes, ugly, misshapen, diseased, an offense to nose and eye.

Far different were the wild pigs, clean feeders, nimble, leading an active, healthy life, content in their little communities where each helped the other, rendering loyal obedience to their chosen chiefs who led them wisely and guarded them against their foes. True warriors were the boars, knights of the wild, fearless protectors of the females and the young, always ready to place their sturdy bodies between them and danger.

From their aerie among the boulders the pigs could look over a wide panorama of long, flat topped hills with precipitous sides, others conical as sugar loaves, still others sloping gently down to the plains. Afar the hills were seamed with winding nullahs—steep-banked, deep beds of rivers dry except in the rainy season from the end of June to the middle of October. Here they were covered with jungle—not the dense undergrowth and giant trees of the Terai Forest with their orchid-clad boughs and tangled festoons of swinging creepers, but breast high, dry yellow grass hiding countless, sharp-thorned bushes, and dotted with low trees that, too, had more thorns than leaves.

The painfully cultivated fields were won and kept from the encroaching wilderness only by the patient toil of countless generations of hard working Indian peasants. Their thatched, mud walled huts were gathered together in ugly little hamlets of narrow, foul alleys crowded all day long with naked children and gangs of masterless pariah dogs.

They labored hard, these brown-skinned cultivators, under a burning sun or in the drenching tropical rain, to till their fields of maize or sugar cane. They broke the stony soil with wooden plows dragged by patient, humpbacked little bullocks, scattering by hand the seed loaned them at extortionate interest by flinty-hearted usurers.

They starved themselves and their children to bribe the Brahmin priest in the white-washed temple to intercede with the gods to send a generous rainy season. When harvest time came they reaped the scanty crops with sickles handed down to them by their fathers' fathers.

They toiled the livelong day, and yet

were not free to sleep by night. For when the green blades pushed up between the loose stones to gladden their eyes and their hearts, then, from his lair in the hills, each hungry wild boar and his brood marked the welcome sight and stole down by night to invade the cultivation and condemn the peasants to famine and starvation.

So, to defend their food supply, the tired husbandmen had to watch their precious fields in the dark hours and guard them from the four-legged robbers. They must rely on shouts and slings to drive the raiders away, knowing, to their cost, that these were sure to return again the next night.

For the peasant is too poor to possess a gun; indeed, in British India he is generally permitted no better arm than his wire-bound cudgel. Well for him that the boar, as plucky and stout-hearted a beast as walks, is peace loving and imbued with the wild animal's universal avoidance of man.

II

BUT, as it is, the wild warriors, where they can flourish with immunity, are a curse to the cultivator, who would hail with joy the coming of a tiger into his neighborhood in the hope that it might rid him of the pest. The Hindu has little fear of the great cat, since it seldom attacks man unprovoked; and, if the cattle are well fenced in the village byres at night by high and impenetrable hedges of dry thorn, the striped thief may be content to prey on the wild pig.

However, no tiger chanced to wander the way of the very young boar that had climbed wearily up the steep hill after the raid. Stronger with every sun, he roamed the jungle by day or plundered the fields by night, always in company with his group of relatives.

Wild pigs are true Orientals in their family love and cling closer than gypsies. The father is lord and lawgiver to his small harem of wives and children; and he leads them to find the food that nature offers or man provides against his will.

More than once—as the youngster was growing up—a slinking, skulking hyena, with jaws stronger than a tiger's, and a heart smaller than a mouse's, looked hungrily at him out of one eye as it sneaked down the hill in search of carrion; but it kept the other on the great boar lying near, and wisely went on its way.

Once a panther almost caught him as

he was straying from the family circle, but a deep grunt warned the spotted robber off just in time. It stole noiselessly on velvety paws out of reach of the father's gleaming tusks, leaving the incautious youngster unscathed.

The time came when the white points pushed out of his aching gums and his own tusks began to show themselves. As they grew, the lower one was longer and sharper, crescent shaped, needlelike, deep-embedded since less than half of its length showed outside. The upper was shorter, blunter, curved to fit close against its fellow in the lower jaw.

They were deadly weapons of defense—only of defense; for the wild boar, confident in his own strength, is not quarrelsome or aggressive, but brave and chivalrous. Yet beasts of prey generally shun him, and no man seeks to fight him on level terms.

Until he was fully grown, this youngster was content to stay with his family, live with it, raid with it, rob the fields and flee back with it when dawn and the stones and shouts of the watchers drove them out of the crops. The ryots—as Indian cultivators are called—abused them eloquently; but libels on the pigs' female ancestors for many generations back—which were the chief theme of the abuse—had not the effect of shaming the thieves away.

Then the headmen of the villages took counsel together; and a fleet-footed youth set off barefoot to run thirty miles along dusty highways to appeal for aid at a military station. There, as in all others throughout India, young English officers were fretting for sport.

The four-legged parties most intimately concerned in the matter knew nothing of this, and continued their nightly raids. But one morning, as dawn streaked the sky, the wild pigs, feeding in a certain group of fields, noticed with uneasiness that the spasmodic bursts of shouts to which they had grown accustomed were changed into systematic cries approaching in a long, strung out line.

And the hard earth echoed to a regulated tapping of heavy sticks; a strange noise that, like the unusual always, contained a threat. So, as the day dawned, little sounders of wild pigs broke almost simultaneously out of the green crops on a mile front.

Behind them came scores of barelegged

peasants, some with threadbare brown blankets wrapped around their heads and shoulders to keep out the morning chill, others shivering in their thin white cotton garments. They struck the ground rhythmically with their long, wire bound cudgels, they cried out, not loudly, but regularly; and before them the raiders retreated.

But close behind the coolies were little groups of horsemen at long intervals, white men on well-groomed ponies; and each rider's right hand held a long bamboo spear with a sharp steel head. Every group was captained by one more skilled in the great Indian sport of pigsticking than his fellows.

This leader it was who, when a sounder stampeded in the open before them, decided which one among the boars was worthy of being hunted, and, when it had had, in his opinion, a fair start, he gave the word to ride after it. No females must be chased, or small and immature boars; but only such as are fully grown and well able to defend themselves.

Soon the stony plain was covered with flying groups, the advanced point of each a black or gray boar with three or four riders strung out in a file behind him according to the speed of their ponies. They raced at top pace after the lumbering quarry that, with all his awkward motion, yet gave them as much as they could do to overtake him.

And when the first rider did so, and leaned forward with leveled spear to give the death stroke, the boar jinked, that is, swung sharply off in a new direction, and the disappointed man was carried on helplessly, tugging in vain at the reins as his excited horse galloped on. Again and again the hunted animal thus threw out its pursuers until at last, too tired to run farther, it stopped, and, the light of battle shining in its eyes, turned to fight to the death. The wild boar is a blithe warrior.

III

MEANWHILE the sows and the young males fled, terrified but unmolested, over the loose stones, into and out of the nullahs, and through the scrub and long grass, heading for the sanctuary of the hills. Our growing boar was one, dazed at the sudden happening, not grasping what it meant.

But understanding came when, bursting out suddenly into an open space, he saw, away to his right, his father, a group leader, go down with a spear through his heart,

roll over and over and lie still on his back with all four legs stiff in air.

For the moment panic seized him, for he was yet very young; and with beating heart he swerved off toward a clump of thorny bushes with some vague idea of hiding in it.

But suddenly he checked with forelegs stretched out. Around the bushes came one of the strange new beasts, half horse, half man, that he was seeing for the first time this day.

It galloped straight at him. For a second he thought of flight, but suddenly the courage of his breed flamed up in him, and with a grunt he charged his awful enemy.

The rider's spear had gone down instinctively at sight of him, but a second glance showed the slender form and barely protruding tusks. Raising his point again, the rider pulled his horse aside with a pleased laugh at the youngster's courage, and passed on.

The astonished little boar marveled at the abrupt ending to the fight, but he had an undefined feeling that mercy had been shown him. And still wondering, he climbed to the hilltop, where the scattered groups of pigs were gathering, to lament, some of them, the leaders that would never return.

Five years later he was lord and leader of his own sounder, a fine, upstanding animal nearly forty inches at the shoulder, with long white tusks showing out of his jaws on each side of his big head. His bristle-covered hide was black.

His short legs seemed too slender to bear his weight; but they could carry him quickly enough over the ground when, as happened once or twice, he was chased by pig-stickers, none of whom had ever got within spear's length of him. Yet this was due even more to his agility in dodging than to his speed. The villagers knew him well by sight, and called him Burra Dhantwallah—the Big Tusked One.

Increasing size and weight had, he found, their disadvantages, for, as he grew bigger and heavier, he found himself less nimble. But the fact was not borne in on him strongly at first, since for a long time the raids on the cultivation had been given up because of the reprisals by the white hunters that they entailed.

But gradually the memory of their losses slipped from the memory of the sounders, in most of which young boars had arisen to lead them in place of older

ones fallen under the spears of their enemies. And so, in this sixth year of his life, Burra Dhantwallah found himself one day again galloping among the rocks and patches of scrub jungle with a string of horsemen lengthening out behind him.

That the leaders were very near him was his own fault, since he had deliberately waited to draw the hunters away from the females and young of his sounder, although he knew that he was the real object of the pursuit. His chivalrous self-sacrifice was likely to cost him dear, when he found that he was not as speedy as he had been a year before.

But his cunning remained. Again and again a rider was carried on helplessly in the wrong direction, vainly trying to turn his maddened horse and follow the wily boar which had jinked just as the spear point had seemed ready to touch him.

And the chase at last got into such broken ground, narrow but deep nullahs, rocky mounds and impenetrable thorny scrub, that one by one the hunters were thrown out and lost sight of the elusive quarry, until Burra Dhantwallah was left with only a single enemy pounding along at his heels.

But he was tiring now, his breath failing, his laboring heart thumping against his ribs. Yet his spirit was as staunch as ever; and, as the solitary hunter followed closely his twists and turns in the mad chase among thick bushes set with sharp hooks, over loose stones that slipped from under the pony's hoofs, between clumps of tall cactus with their cruel spines, the big boar stopped suddenly, swung round, and, with a vicious grunt, charged straight at his persistent pursuer.

At sight of the savage beast bounding toward him, the pony took fright, swerved first to one side, then to the other, disconcerting his rider's aim with the spear, and finally, in its blind terror, galloped straight at the oncoming boar and sprang right over him.

As it passed above him, Burra Dhantwallah leaped, and, with one upward rake of a long tusk, gashed its chest to the girth and brought the wounded pony crashing to the ground, its rider's leg pinned under it.

The man lay almost stunned, yet conscious enough to be aware of swiftly coming death as the boar turned savagely on him. Utterly helpless, unable to move, he

gave himself up for lost as he saw the dead-ly tusks gleam.

But was it remembrance of the mercy shown him?—a feeling of chivalry that disdained vengeance on a helpless foe seemed to possess the boar. Checking in his fatal rush, he turned and bounded out of sight.

IV

WHEN, breathless and exhausted, Burra Dhantwallah had reached the hilltop he found his scattered sounder come together again. They had given him up for lost, and the next boar in line of succession was already beginning to regard the others with a masterful eye. To his disappointment he was forced to stand aside as the rest welcomed their returned lord.

Burra Dhantwallah harbored no malice, for it was the law of the wild. When the leader vanished or grew old and feeble the rule must pass to one younger, bolder, and more vigorous; and it was not just to blame a would-be supplanter. This one, however, must wait awhile yet or break away and start a little family of his own. And this he did before long, leaving the big boar to continue unchallenged in his rulership.

Well it was for the sounder that their chieftain was no inexperienced leader, when what the cultivators had so ardently hoped for actually happened. Into the domain of the wild pigs came the tyrant of the jungle, an orange-skinned, black-barred young tiger, fresh launched on its career of slaughter.

It signaled its intrusion on the community by pouncing upon a sow sleeping with her litter, slaying and devouring all. Panic seized those lying around, and the whole colony scattered and fled down the hill. Next day, hidden in bushes over a pool in a nullah, the great cat caught a young boar off its guard when drinking, and killed him.

On the following afternoon, as it prowled over the hill, it came on Burra Dhantwallah's sounder resting and dozing among the rocks on the flat crest preparatory to a night raid.

Crouching low, crawling forward cautiously inch by inch, it drew near, unperceived, until it was almost within springing distance. Then a restless young sow, getting up to find a softer spot to lie on, saw the killer and gave the alarm.

There was a wild stampede. The tiger, rising up, was about to rush after the flee-

ing pigs, but Burra Dhantwallah dashed through the fugitives and faced it.

For a moment the great striped beast stared at him, amazed that an animal of any but its own race should dare to stand up to it. A fight between the two so unequally matched appeared impossible.

The tiger was so very much larger, heavier, and better armed than the boar, whose tusks appeared a poor weapon to oppose to the fangs and claws of the beast of prey. But Burra Dhantwallah did not flinch, for he knew that the safety of the females and young depended on him.

Not for a moment did he think of saving himself by flight and letting them be sacrificed in his stead. No mailclad knight of old had greater courage or higher chivalry than this jungle champion of the weak.

The tiger was too young and inexperienced to know that a wild boar is not a foe to be despised. Disdaining caution in the attack, it rushed with an angry roar at the foolhardy animal that dared to intervene between it and its prey.

With lowered head Burra Dhantwallah waited unmoved until his enemy was almost on him, then, as it charged blindly at him, he slipped aside with surprising agility. The baffled tiger was carried past him by the impetus of its furious attack.

Enraged, it turned and again dashed at the motionless boar. This time, as the great cat swept by, Burra Dhantwallah plunged at it, and, with a sweeping rake of a sharp tusk, ripped its flank open, inflicting a deep but not disabling wound.

With a scream of pain the tiger swung round. Taught caution, he rushed at the boar, but checked suddenly and struck savagely.

Burra Dhantwallah leaped away a fraction of a second too late. The heavy paw caught him on the head, barely missing the eye, but tearing the ear away and scoring gashes that cut to the bone.

The boar was staggered by the force of the blow, and barely saved himself by a swift sidewise movement as the tiger sprang in to follow up its advantage. Again baffled, the great cat stopped and glared at its opponent. Burra Dhantwallah turned to present his formidable tusks as it crouched to spring again.

With a deafening roar the tiger leaped clear over him, striking a downward blow as it did so, and all but knocking him over. But the boar recovered himself quickly

and swung about again to face his terrible foe as dauntlessly as ever.

Before such courage the tiger weakened, and would willingly have withdrawn from the fight. Moving aside it tried to pass him to pursue the fast disappearing sows and young.

V

BUT their champion would not desert them to save himself, and he still thrust his body between them and danger. This time he did not wait to be attacked, but suddenly shot forward in a fierce charge which nearly caught the tiger napping, as it stared after the fleeing pigs.

Only a sudden spring aside saved the slayer. But not altogether, for Burra Dhantwallah got another thrust in and gashed its ribs badly.

With a savage snarl the tiger struck back at him, with a vicious blow that scored long, raking cuts from neck to rump. Then, determined to end the fight, it bounded in and suddenly leaped high, intending to come down on the boar's back.

But as it rose off the ground Dhantwallah dashed in under it. Springing

straight up on hind legs as the tiger's body passed over him, he thrust upward, plunging his tusk deep into its belly and ripping it open with a terrible raking cut.

With a scream the tiger fell forward on its head and tried to stagger up; but the boar charged in and drove his blood-stained tusk into its side.

The mortally wounded cat curled round and clawed him horribly, but the gallant pig only thrust his fatal weapon in deeper with an upward lift of his head, until the deadly clasp of the claws relaxed. The striped terror had been outgamed.

Then, as the boar withdrew his tusk and backed away, the tiger fell heavily. It struggled vainly to arise, then lay writhing in agony on the blood-stained ground.

Burra Dhantwallah painfully dragged his torn body away and collapsed in exhaustion among the rocks. He was critically wounded, but victorious, and content to suffer since he had saved the rest of his family.

And from the sky and earth the undertakers of the jungle—the vultures and the jackals—gathered hungrily to watch the last tremors of the dying tiger.

THE SEA CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER

The salt of the sea upon your lips,
The depth of the sea in your eyes,
The breath of it in arms flung wide—
These are the things I prize.

With you I'd brave an inland town,
Or tramp a windy lea;
For ever in your heart I'd find
Tang of the salty sea.

The folk that live in cities close,
With ne'er a glimpse of that blue,
Grow narrow like those selfsame towns
And all are dull but you.

For I forget I'm city-bound
When I tread on their sod,
And sing care-free as though I were
Upon the sea with God.

You know He loves the seamen
And all who trust the sea,
For His stars smile on the ocean
More than just at a tree.

So you who, from an inland town,
And by some mystic means,
Have gained the sea span for your soul—
I've loved since early 'teens.

Hamilton Brooks

The Tired Business Man

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—RELATING THE PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THAT SUCCESSFUL MUSICAL COMEDY, "MAY BUDS," WAS PRODUCED FOR TIRED BUSINESS MEN BY A MEMBER OF THAT INFLUENTIAL CLASS

By Katharine Hill

THE worst of detours is that the way back to the main road is too often indicated sketchily, or not at all. A critical and imperious wife at one's elbow does not make things easier for the motorist.

In such cases Bill Jevons had learned to act on his wife's convictions rather than his own. At her sharp "I'm sure this is wrong!" he would back docilely to the debated fork and take the other road. These tactics, he knew, resulted in more vain wanderings, but they saved him the bitter half of Arline's reproaches when they did go wrong. In what a strong position is he who can say:

"Well, my dear, I thought myself the left-hand turn—"

It was quite obvious now that they had gone wrong, for the road was growing worse, though you might have said it was impossible for it to grow worse, and the country it parted lonelier and lonelier.

"Well, shall we turn back?" Bill hazarded, slowing.

Every mile covered in such circumstances makes one more reluctant to turn back. Not for awhile longer would Arline give her petulant permission to turn. When at last she did so, and he could take his eyes from the ruts that demanded such close steering, Bill eyed her displeased profile with the guilty feeling of the subject husband who is failing, for whatever cause, to provide his wife with the comfort that is her due.

She was the sort of woman who readily evokes this compunction in the man privileged to look after her. She was panned in woman's evident superiority of

clothes worthy of her beauty and beauty worthy of her clothes. For this single toilet and its accessories Jevons had paid as much as for the car they rode in. Arline had come to him without a penny, but both of them had forgotten that long ago. It was taken for granted between them that the most expensive of everything was her right, and barely good enough for her at that.

He was apologetic, accordingly, because he couldn't produce a first-rate inn where they might stop for tea, and a concrete road leading from its door back to civilization. Yet, they would have had both before now, had his judgment prevailed over hers at the last crossroads.

He had maneuvered the car about, with some difficulty, and now essayed to start on the return journey. To his consternation, the engine back-fired suddenly and violently. Arline winced and closed her eyes. Jevons switched off the motor and, climbing out, gingerly lifted the hood.

He was no mechanic, but a man who had become rich through giving a specialist's attention to his own business. He was afraid of the powerful animal that crouched under that hood—an animal usually tractable, but once in awhile mysteriously annoyed. Of course, there is nearly always a garage; only this afternoon there was no garage.

Arline interrupted his stupor of indecision to say hotly:

"Aren't you going to do anything? Are we to stay here all night?"

"There's a sort of a track going up to the left there," he suggested feebly. "It probably leads to a house. I'll cut up and

see if I can telephone. You wait here, nice and comfy."

"Comfy!" she sneered. "I'm cramped and hungry and thirsty and tired to death. You might be forever, too, and I detest waiting!" She flung back the supple fur that lay across her knees, and stepped down to the road, on high-heeled sandal pumps. "I'll probably sprain an ankle, and there probably isn't a house, anyhow. You certainly have bungled things this afternoon, Bill Jevons!"

"Well, I'm betting on the house," he said cheerfully. "Here, take my arm, then you won't break any ankles. There's been a cart along here—and listen! Now our engine's not making that unholy noise, I fancy I hear something, don't I? Something like distant music? If the peasantry over the hill have a radio with a loud speaker, it's a safe bet they have a telephone, too, so all is well."

They stopped to listen.

"I don't hear a thing," she pronounced crossly. "You have the most optimistic imagination I ever knew."

The road turned and led upward steeply. As they mounted with it, the horizon seemed to rise and widen, and over the shadowed hillsides around them distant mountain summits showed themselves, still dreaming in the last of the sunlight, an unearthly haze of gold. The woods through which their way led had a gorgeous range of color, and there was a wild unprofaned beauty in this sunless hour just verging upon dusk; but Arline offered no comment except upon the disgraceful state of the road.

Simultaneously they caught a new burst of music, unmistakable this time. Coming clear of the woods, they saw a tumble-down old house beyond, and near at hand a group of four small children. All were much of an age and dressed alike, without distinction of sex, in shabby corduroy knickers and threadbare sweaters.

Bill hailed them eagerly:

"Got a telephone down at your house, buddies?"

The children looked blank. The tallest one came forward and stood in the road, as if to bar the strangers' way.

"There's a telephone over at Barnet's—that's a farm about a mile from here, where they sometimes take boarders. We wouldn't have one for money, in our house!"

"The deuce you say! Well, I guess I'll go on up to the house and see what's what. Perhaps I could make a deal with one of you lads to run over to the farm with a message; but I'll talk to them at the house first—"

"But you can't go up there now!" the boy interposed hastily. "They're working—can't you hear them? We mustn't go near ourselves until we're called."

"Doesn't sound much like working to me," Bill said skeptically. "Sounds like playing."

It was a mad dance tune that drifted from the house now—a catchy, melodious, breathless little tune, not unduly jazzed, but played with a verve that set the hearers' muscles twitching to its rhythm. Disappointingly it broke off, went back a few bars, and repeated itself, with some scarcely perceptible changes, again, again, and yet once again. After that it tried developing itself differently, and then it entirely threw overboard the idea of rhythm, and concentrated on one progression, played heavily.

"That was a mighty pretty thing before it went crazy!" Bill remarked in bewilderment, and, disregarding the children's excited "You mustn't go to the house! Nobody must when they're *working*!" he pushed past them and marched boldly forward.

There was a sagging porch, approached by broken steps. As the strangers came near, a shout from inside was followed by a burst of laughter, and Arline stopped suddenly, digging her fingers into her husband's arm.

"Suppose this is some sort of lunatic asylum, put way off in the wilds like this!" she said, in alarm.

"Then we'll get hold of a keeper and talk to him. You aren't scared, are you, really? Come on—I'll take care of you!"

II

ALTHOUGH the door stood open, and Jevons's knock was not timid, he did not at once succeed in making himself heard above the genial uproar. He and Arline had a moment or two of waiting in which to take in the picture before them in all its details—the shabby room, between firelight and the last of daylight, and full, it seemed at first glance, of a grand piano, a table strewn with papers, and some extraordinarily intent and pleasurably ex-

cited people. At the piano a man with a shock of red hair, horn spectacles, and a cigarette drooping from one corner of his mouth, was thudding heavy chords with great vim and evident satisfaction. He wore a gray flannel shirt, turned in at the neck, and with rolled-up sleeves, and Arline thought that he looked like a brigand.

A girl in green was bent over the table, scribbling in mad haste, while the fingers of her left hand, working rapidly in a curly bob, stirred it to ever wilder confusion. At a far window sat a serene, plump, pretty woman with a darning basket. By the piano stood a man who seemed to belong to his surroundings as little as the two on the porch, by the correctitude of his sports tailoring, his flagrant good looks, and the swagger with which he held himself; yet, his concentration was apparent.

Jevons knocked again, and then, in desperation, walked in and shouted above the clamor:

"I beg your pardon, but—"

Every one looked extraordinarily surprised, dismayed, and upset. The man at the piano called helplessly:

"Oh, I say, Sally, will you—"

The woman with the darning basket set it aside and began to thread her way toward the intruders. The girl continued to scribble, as if no one had come in; but the personable young man, suddenly becoming aware of Arline, blinked once or twice, and bent to the pianist to hiss:

"Soft pedal, for Pete's sake!" He wreathed his face with conventional smiles. "Very extraordinary thing for anybody to penetrate up here from civilization," he added, turning to the strangers. "That's why Ben looks as if he was seeing ghosts—"

"Do sit down," murmured the plump lady, reaching them at last. "If you walked up our hill, you must be exhausted. I don't know when I've done such a thing myself!"

Indeed, her curves showed that she could not be in the habit of doing it often.

"My wife and I are motoring through—" Bill made his explanation and asked his questions hopefully.

"Garage? Telephone? Oh, good grief!" she cried. "The nearest telephone is at Barnett's; only it's sure to be out of order, after yesterday's storm. Otherwise Phil could have left a message for you when he goes back—if he weren't staying here for dinner, as of course he is!"

"They have a phone at the waterworks office," suggested the well dressed young man; "but that's four miles from here, if you take the short cut over the mountain, which—er—which—"

"Which no one on earth who didn't know it could possibly follow, with darkness coming on."

Bill blundered badly.

"I saw some raggedy little kids up near your gate. Couldn't I make it worth while for one of them to—"

"My children!" gasped Sally, reddening with offense, and he floundered into apologies that made things worse.

The scribbling girl made a happy diversion by raising her head just here and speaking for the first time, though the interchange that followed between her and the pianist reawakened Arline's suspicion that they had strayed into a lunatic asylum. She said:

"Dum-di, tum-tum — tum-ti, dum-dum — tra-la-la, tum-ti-tum — tra-la-la-la, tum-ti-tum?"

"No, no!" the reply came testily. "Tra-la, la-la-la, tum-ti-tum!"

"That's all right—that's better. How's this, everybody?" and she recited, apparently without shame:

"Beautiful Mazie
Must have been crazy—
She would not bob her hair,
Though wooed by a millionaire,
Who for long hair did not care.
'I will stay single,
Before I shingle!
Crazy Mazie would declare!"

"Very cute!" and "Great stuff!" came the comments, and the poetess glowed and grinned, and suddenly revealed herself as pretty.

"Most awfully interesting, I'm sure," Arline drawled insolently. Then, with an incisive change of tone, she launched her challenge: "The question is, good people—what are we to do?"

"We might as well stop work for today!" said Ben, getting up and shutting the piano with a gesture of violence which was caught back at the last possible instant, so that, after all, there was no bang.

"Well, I think so myself," Sally agreed. "It's getting late, and it grows chilly early these days, and those poor children must be hungry. If you'll clear up here and call them in, I'll start dinner right away."

"I'm starved myself, come to think of

it," said Ben, recovering his good humor. "We haven't done so badly to-day, at that. Now, about these people here—"

"They'll have to stay the night, of course," Sally declared.

"We couldn't think of giving you so much trouble," protested Bill Jevons.

"No, no!" She smiled warmly. "Now that the work's over, we can all act human again. It's only a very scratch hospitality that we can offer, but, such as it is, we're very glad to have you. I'm sure we can manage. Joan—oh, she's gone to call the children!—well, I know she has an extra cot she can put up in her tent, because she had a friend here last month. That will do nicely for Mrs.—"

"Jevons," supplied Bill, faintly.

Arline sleeping on a cot, in a tent! He looked apprehensively over at her to see how she was receiving the suggestion—which, luckily, she hadn't heard.

He could tell by the tightened muscles at the corners of her mouth, by the lift of one delicate eyebrow and the shifting sidelong gleam of her eyes, just what she was thinking of this place and these people—a set of shabby Bohemians, in a room which she probably likened to the interior of a miner's shack. Bill perceived this the more unerringly and with the more distress, because in his own soul there was rising a kind of wild exultation at being here, and a happy recognition of some principle in the very air—some feeling of liberty and care-freedom—for which he had been starving now for a long time.

The Jevonses knew a great many people. Arline entertained lavishly and constantly; and whenever Bill was not at work, he was sure to be doing something in the company of at least half a dozen members of their circle. This afternoon they had been on their way back to New York from an up-the-Hudson festivity involving a crowd; yet there was a flavor of comradeship here, among these unconventional people, which was conspicuously lacking in the society that Arline drew about her.

The scribbling girl, Joan, came in with the children, and Sally parleyed with her in the doorway:

"You can take Mrs. Jevons, can't you? You have the cot Kathleen used when she was here."

"Oh, yes—that will be all right!"

"Is your brother coming down here to-night?"

"I've just asked Chris to run up and tell him not to. You know he hates strangers, and loves messing alone with a book. Of course I'll stay and help you."

There was dinner presently. The children were immensely active about getting the meal on the table, and now that the ban of silence imposed by their elders' work was lifted, they were very expansive and inclined to monopolize the conversation. Arline had beside her the man to whom she had referred, in a whisper to her husband, as "the civilized one"; and while she ignored every one else, she found herself able to smile graciously upon him.

The meal was simple, and simply served, but excellently cooked. Once Ben left the table to try out at the piano a phrase that had just visited him. It was the scribbling girl who explained to Jevons this casual procedure, and the strange activities of the afternoon.

"We're writing a musical comedy, the three of us, and it's more amusing than anything I ever tried, besides which it's expected to make us all rich. Phil Dessez is doing the book. He's on the stage—perhaps you've seen him? Anyhow, he's written vaudeville sketches and things, and has a lucky hand, as you can see from his clothes. We rag him a lot about his clothes, but he *will* dress that way! I'm doing the lyrics. They're pretty bad, but then they wouldn't be lyrics if they were good, would they? Ben's writing the music, which is good. Shall I tell you the plot? After dinner Ben can play over the songs we intend to be hits, and Phil and I will sing them. Well, this is the plot."

Bill listened to the unfolding of the extravagant story with a pleasant interest. Like many men of affairs, he had a strong story sense and an instinctive appreciation of points and values in narrative, although he had never tried to set a story down on paper. His understanding of the dramatic possibilities of Dessez's scenario was blunter, but he agreed warmly when Ben Gardiner broke in with enthusiastic praise for this device or that climax:

"That 'll go great—this is a wow—that scene between *Peggy* and *Mendoza* is sure-fire stuff!"

Miss Young—nobody having introduced her, the girl Joan had confided her full name to Jevons on her own motion—told the story of the play extraordinarily well, though the ability to give an idea of a play

is one of the rarest of gifts. Perhaps because she was so familiar with her material, she developed it swiftly and directly, with none of the usual confusion, no "Oh, but I forgot to say," and no assumption of essential bits of knowledge about the piece which the hearer does not possess. She even sketched out the climaxes of certain scenes dramatically, with a brief but suggestive characterization of the different parts.

It was a clever and spirited performance, and at the end of it Bill declared himself appreciatively:

"You ought to be on the stage yourself, it seems to me!"

She flushed a little.

"I am—more or less. If the show goes, I'm to do *Peggy*."

After dinner Gardiner played half a dozen numbers from the score of the musical comedy, while Arline sat disdainful and withdrawn, keeping Dessez beside her, and the others grouped themselves about the piano. Soon the flurry of bedtime was upon them, and Joan Young was making her way to the window seat.

"Mrs. Jevons, will you come with me? It isn't far—just a little climb through the woods, and I have my flash."

Arline got to her feet, with the face of an ill tempered martyr. She said with the most blatant insincerity that it was so sweet of Joan to take her in, and that it would be too amusing to sleep in a tent.

While she was saying a bitter good night to her hosts and her husband, she observed an interchange of whispers between the girl and Dessez, and was annoyed by it. Given the unlimited opportunities of a place like this, he might, of course, very well belong to that girl, though he would not belong to her very long if Arline decided that it was worth while to take him away. If he was an actor, of course he must be in town a great deal, and opportunity would not be lacking.

She followed Joan out into a night that made her shiver. There were more stars, and bigger and brighter ones, than she remembered to have noticed anywhere before. Joan's flash showed grass electrically green, weighted with dew, then a patch of dank pine needles and a rough path over the irregularities of forest ground. There was a brook to cross on a plank.

"Is it much farther?" Arline demanded.

"Why, it's no distance!"

"Why do you live in a place like this? I should think you'd much rather be somewhere where there's more going on."

"Oh, this place is ideal for us, Mrs. Jevons," replied Joan, quickly. Unable to see Arline's face of disdain, it was possible for her to mistake the question for an expression of real interest, and to respond accordingly. "My brother and I have made our little camp as comfortable as possible, and wait till you see our view to-morrow morning! The Gardiners' is nothing to it. It's because of my brother's health that we have to be here. He has tuberculosis, you see, but he has improved simply wonderfully since we came, nearly three years ago. You can imagine how grateful we are to the Gardiners. Of course, we could have got camping rights anywhere—it's not that, though it saves us a few dollars, and of course, as neither of us can work, that means something; but it's a question of morale. You see how it keeps us going—the companionship—intellectual, artistic, human—having the children, and dear Sally herself. They stay very late and come early, but we've lived here through two winters. I do think they've saved Ned's life—which, by the way, the doctors quite gave up before we came here."

Arline always changed the subject when anything disagreeable was spoken of. Now she said, without the tribute of even a sympathetic murmur to this frank girl's confidence:

"Surely I see a light ahead there! Is that your tent?"

"That's Ned's tent. Doesn't it look like a big Japanese lantern? We needn't be afraid of waking him, you see. Ours is over here."

She directed the light of the flash upon it, and led the way. Arline followed, divided between a distaste for the queer, cramped, insufficient shelter of the tent and an uneasiness which had sprung to birth in her within the last few minutes. She had grasped, earlier, that the girl's name was Young. That was a name that anybody might have; but *Ned* Young, tubercular and given up for dead three years before—

There was a step outside, and then, as the girl lit candles, a voice called:

"Say, Joan!"

The sister lifted the tent flap to slip out and speak to him, and the yellow light fell

on the face of the man outside, illumining it softly against the blackness of the night beyond. The glimpse lasted only for a moment, for Joan dropped the tent flap behind her, and the two moved away in low-toned talk.

The man was Ned, Arline's husband. There was no possible room for doubt or question. He had not changed, except with better health that made him more like the Ned she had married, and less like the dying man she had left. She dropped upon the cot, and her teeth all but met through her lower lip.

He hadn't died, then! A vicious little jet of anger against him rose in her. How like him not to have died—not even in all this time! She had waited ten months before she married again. She might have waited thirty, and still it wouldn't have been enough!

Married again! But she wasn't married at all, or, if a wife, she was Ned's still, and had never been Bill Jevons's. Her easy rule over Bill was at the mercy of any moment's betrayal. Another realization chilled her. She was guilty of bigamy, a ticketed crime for which people are sent to jail. Arline shivered convulsively.

Getting to her feet to take the exact position she had been in when she saw her husband's face, she satisfied herself that her own must have been deeply shadowed, for the dressing table, with its two candlesticks, was almost directly behind her. Her clothes, too; her differently done hair! Oh, there was no possibility, as indeed there had been no indication, that Ned had recognized her. She could be sure that he was not now telling the whole story to the girl Joan; but there was to-morrow to be reckoned with—to-morrow, when she could not possibly avoid a face-to-face meeting with him in the daylight.

She undressed quickly, and slipped into the chilly little bed, turning her face to the canvas wall. How uncomfortable it was, how hard, how like the sort of beds she imagined people were given to sleep on in prisons! She felt suffocated, furious, and trapped. She hadn't been to blame! Ned was to blame for not dying. The doctor was to blame for telling her so positively that he was bound to die.

She thought of Bill Jevons, and what an ideal instrument he was of a woman's will to gratification, how rich, how good-humored in subjection, and how adequate

when—in every sort of difficulty but this one—you shrugged your burden off your shoulders and onto his! But this was a trouble that he must not even know about.

Joan came back into the tent.

"Oh, you've got into bed, haven't you? You must be tired! I was telling my brother all about you, and he's looking forward so much to meeting you to-morrow! Do you know, I have to run back to the house and see about something—will you go to sleep and not wait for me? I'll blow out the candles and leave my nightgown on the bed, where I can get it in the dark. I may be gone some little time, but you needn't be nervous, you know. My brother's tent isn't a stone's throw away."

III

WHEN the girl had gone, Arline got out of bed and groped for the long, black satin coat she had taken off, and for her slippers. Ned, she was sure, hadn't recognized her, but she had to reach some understanding with him, since their meeting to-morrow was almost a certainty. Joan's departure gave her a chance to get that first encounter over in the absence of witnesses, and to find out what he might be disposed to do. It was a piece of sheer luck, and she took advantage of it promptly.

His tent was still lit—a pale glowing rectangle against the black shoulder of the mountain. She stooped to the entrance, and went in brusquely, with the assurance of old familiar habit.

He was reading in bed, tranquilly at ease. At sight of the woman he sat bolt upright, frowning amazed incredulity, without a word. She was beautiful enough—with her loose bright hair streaming over the dully lustrous coat, her eyes all black pupil, and her red lips parted—to have startled any man, even had her apparition awakened no memories. Perhaps Ned Young was accustomed to see some such image all but materialize before his eyes, and to hold out hungry arms to it, or to turn from it cursing, according to his mood.

"I recognized you," she said. "I don't know if you knew me. I had to come. Fancy running across you like this! There wasn't a chance in a million of our ever seeing each other again."

Speech came to him with some difficulty.

"It is really you? Joan said it was an automobile breakdown. She said—she said—a man and—his wife!"

Arline sat down composedly on the foot of the camp bed, which creaked a little, not being built for double weight.

"Yes, that's why I came. That's what I want to talk to you about."

Ned fell back against his pillows.

"When you walked out on me, you broke a contract that was all give and no take, for you. I don't deny that it was a jolt for me when I found you'd quit me cold. It's not a thing you expect a woman to do, somehow. It seemed as if you might have stuck a little longer, and seen the last of me."

"I'd have been sticking there still, wouldn't I?"

"Arline, I honestly don't think you would. I think, if you'd stuck, I'd have been under the daisies, according to schedule, in three months at most."

"Then"—she clutched eagerly at her tardy justification—"I did the best thing for you by going!"

"Two opinions about that, maybe; but about the fact there's no doubt, if it's any satisfaction to you to know it. You kept me stirred up all the time, you see—hoping and then cast down. You remember the quarrels we used to have. That sort of thing takes it out of a fellow. Here, of course, I'm not living at all, in a sense, but there seems no reason I shouldn't hang on, half and half like this, forever. This place suits my case a lot better than Texas, too."

"Ned, do you—hate me?"

"That part of me's dead, I'm telling you. Hate and love—two sides of the same thing, really. I don't blame you for leaving me, though if it had been you that was sick, I—oh, well, talking's easy! I suppose you pulled one of these absent-treatment divorces on me—the kind you get in France, maybe? I hope your new venture is a better bet than I was."

"That's just it. I didn't get a divorce. I thought that of course—I waited, I—"

"You figured on me being dead!" He broke into a barking laugh. "Got a bit of my own back there, didn't I? Well, my dear girl, you've got yourself into a nice mess, but I don't see why you come to me about it. Run along and get your divorce now—I'm not putting any obstacles in your way—and let your new friend make an honest woman of you!"

"You must see that I can't let him know!"

"What d'you expect, then—that I

should remove myself to make things easier for you? You have another guess, my dear. I'm enjoying existence here, in a queer, belated sort of way—getting to be a bit of a philosopher, communing with nature and all that. I'm even writing a book. If I were willing to bump myself off for any woman, I'd have done it long ago for Joan, so that she could get back to her career, which she interrupted to look after me; but I don't honestly think she'd like me to do it. You may find it hard to get her point of view."

"Nonsense, Ned!" Arline exclaimed hotly. "I made no such suggestion, and thought of no such thing. All I want from you is your promise to meet me like a stranger to-morrow morning. I'm not a bigamist, or a murderess. I've done nothing wrong. I only made a mistake in good faith. I see no reason why you should talk to me like this. You admit yourself that I did the best thing for you, that I was getting the heavy end of our bargain, and that you aren't sure you'd have stuck it out any better if it had been the other way around. All I'm asking for now is time. I can't have this revelation thrown at Bill before a house party of strangers—you must see that."

"Yes, I see that!" A cough took him, less tearing than the coughs of the old days, but severe enough to leave him spent. "I won't—give you away. You might go now—would you?"

IV

AFTER the party broke up with the departure of Joan, Arline, and Dessez, it became evident that a great deal of contrivance and some shifting about of sleeping little boys were going to be necessary in order to provide a couch for Jevons. The extent to which he was incommoding the Gardiners dismayed him, and he broke across the discussion determinedly:

"Look here, Mrs. Gardiner, of course you must do nothing of the kind! I don't know why I didn't think of it before, but obviously the place for me to sleep is the car. I'm enormously obliged to you people for putting my wife up—that's all that matters. Anyhow, I shall be perfectly comfortable. There are plenty of robes and things—and you're not to give me another thought!"

He enjoyed the walk downward through the silent, fragrant woods, where glittering

stars looked at him through the lace of leaves overhead.

"Darned nice crowd!" he mused. "I wish Arline had cottoned to them the way I did! It would be great to have a shack in a place like this—really wild, not selling by the square foot and all landscape-gardened and combed over and tied with pink ribbon. Of course, Arline's a whole lot too good for me. She was the kind of wife I wanted, and I went after her; so the least I can do, to show my appreciation, is to let her have her own way in everything, every time."

But he sighed, thinking how fantastically delightful it would be if she were willing to wear old clothes like Sally Gardiner and Joan Young, and camp out in the wilds just once in awhile, and cook—or, better, let him cook, for like many men he fancied his own camp cooking—their hearty, savory meals over an outdoor fire! Of course, he got off occasionally for that sort of thing, with other men; but there would be something awfully romantic and nice about being able to do it with your wife. Unfortunately, it simply wasn't possible to imagine Arline happy and companionable through such an experiment.

He reached his car, and spent some moments pulling the cushions about and draping rugs. He had an elaborate plan for making himself comfortable, involving the use of the two wide seats placed endwise, and the unhooking of the spare tires to build up a support for his feet. He wasn't sure just how it was going to work. He moved about the car, his mouth pursed, considering.

The sound of voices interrupted his calculations, to his surprise, for he had supposed himself in an utter solitude. They seemed to be approaching by the way he had taken a few minutes earlier. Looking up, he could see a little spot of light wavering along, coming nearer, and a moment later he recognized the tones of Joan Young and Phil Dessez.

Supposing themselves at least a quarter of a mile from any hearer, they were speaking naturally, with no attempt to lower their tones. The air was utterly clear, what slight drift of wind there was setting from them to Jevons. Each voice, too, was stage trained, and had both carrying quality and distinct enunciation. Thus Jevons heard an entire and devastating sentence before it could occur to him to hail them.

"Of course, if you admire the parasite type," he caught first, from Joan, "she's the complete expression of it. Oh, a dream to look at—"

"Well, some men are born asking for it. After all, what other justification of his existence does a man like this Jevons offer? He provides an expensive frame for a beautiful picture, and that's something, after all. He looks to be the complete bonehead all right, doesn't he?"

"Oh, doesn't he?" came Joan's enthusiastic agreement. "Do you know what I was thinking about him all evening? That he's the tired business man in person—the T. B. M., you understand, absolutely typical—in other words, old thing, our master, yours and mine; so I thought it a heaven-sent opportunity to try out our stuff on him."

"Well, he ate it up, all right!"

They were approaching the car steadily, but Bill's impulse to greet them was killed. "The complete bonehead"—"the tired business man"—he, Bill Jevons! He was chokingly angry, and disproportionately hurt at the same time. These two young people didn't know him, and what they thought didn't matter, anyhow; but he could feel the barb of their words taking hold on a tender place, and he knew that it would fester.

He couldn't meet them, now, with the cheery casual remark that would be in order; and the light of the electric flash might pick him out of the darkness at any moment if he stayed here beside the car.

With a swift impulse to conceal himself, he stepped into the back of the automobile and crouched down so that his head was below the level of the door, which he cautiously closed. When they were past him, he would come out and go to bed.

But they did not go on past him. Their objective, it turned out, was the car itself. Dessez leaned in, switched on the lights, and then went forward and raised the hood. They bent together over the engine, over whose secrets Joan played the flash, while Phil explored and tested, did this and that, and several times said, "Damn! Excuse me, Joan!" and several other times said "Damn!" alone.

Then he directed her to take the driver's seat and start the engine. Having the easy mastery of machinery that Bill Jevons lacked, and that most boys in their teens

and twenties possess in these days, he located the difficulty and dealt with it as completely as any garage man. Then he displaced the girl at the wheel.

"So it's burglary, eh?" he remarked. "All right—let's go!"

Jevons had given no sign of his presence, and had already decided to give none. Let them steal the car, if they liked, since they were unwittingly stealing the owner with it! He rather enjoyed the sensation of having his two critics so entirely at his mercy as they were now placing themselves. As for eavesdropping on their conversation, it was not likely that he would hear anything more cutting than he had already heard. If they gave themselves away, that was their lookout.

"Cold?" inquired Dessez casually. "There are probably rugs back there. Want one?"

For a moment his hand, as he reached behind him and groped blindly, all but touched Bill's head.

"I'm not a bit cold, thanks," Joan said, just in time, and the danger was past.

They did not speak a great deal, and, somewhat to Bill's surprise, there was no petting whatever. Once Joan said, a little breathlessly:

"I'd do more than this for Sally and Ben."

"I think maybe this is my limit; but I'm in on this, anyhow," replied her companion, soberly.

Again she observed:

"It's a nice, smooth-running car, isn't it? I don't believe anybody will hear us at all. Still, better park a little this side of the store."

"And have to carry the stuff all that way?"

Dessez drove, Bill could see, much better than himself. Of course, Phil was familiar with the roads, but he maintained a high speed with an avoidance of ruts that seemed remarkable. When at last they swung out upon a tarred road, the speed increased to something better than its owner had known the car could do; but not much later they slowed to a discreet and all but soundless standstill, and Dessez turned off the lights. Then the two in front climbed out silently and disappeared into the shadows ahead.

Bill eased his cramped position and stared after them. It occurred to him that he would be within his rights if he took

the driver's seat and returned whence he had been brought with his permission unasked. Curiosity to know what the pair were up to restrained him, as well as consideration for the girl to whose hospitality, after all, his wife owed her night's rest.

He draped a rug negligently from the rail, so that at the first sound of their return he might dive under it and be concealed as under a tent, while he laid another within easy reach, in case Joan should find the night grow chilly as it advanced. While he waited, he looked around him, and fumbled a cigarette, which he dared not light lest it should betray him.

The car was parked at the intersection of three roads, and Bill, who had been staring at the darkness for some little time, could make out against the star-bright sky the angles of roofs to right and left, and the spring of a church spire ahead. Here was the beginning of a small town, evidently, though not a window anywhere showed a late light.

Hurried returning footsteps made him interrupt his observations and retreat into shelter. Joan and Dessez were beside the car again, and the door directly facing him was being wrenched open. A moment later his outraged person took the brunt of a heavy and sharp-cornered object, which he later made out to be a packing case, dropped with an understandable precipitancy only tempered by some regard for its contents. Bill reacted naturally with a sharp protesting outcry.

Dessez uttered something frantic and profane, banged the door, and slid eelwise into his place behind the wheel. Joan must have followed like a flash as the engine jumped to life. A dog barked, and in the nearest house a window was flung open. Then the car shot backward, quivered to a half second's standstill in a Y turn, and gathered speed on the road along which they had come.

Dessez gave all his attention to driving, but the girl leaned over the back of the seat and demanded breathlessly:

"Who are you, in back there?"

"Who do you suppose I am?" Bill snapped nastily.

He was bitterly disappointed in them both, and in their banal adventure. A nocturnal visit to a bootlegger! A worthy illustration of their superiority to the demands and activities of the tired business man!

"Phil, it's Mr. Jevons!" Joan uttered.

The car swerved in registration of Dessez's surprise, and then its hurtling speed moderated.

"Well, we'll have to let him in on it," he said.

"Thank you, I have a satisfactory cellar of my own," Bill assured them coldly. It occurred to him that he need no longer huddle ignominiously on the floor of the car, and he got up and disposed himself with dignity on the rear seat. "You needn't worry about me. I'm sleeping in the car, but Mr. Dessez is such a speedy driver that I shan't be kept from my rest much longer, if we are now headed for home, as I assume!"

The two in the front seat conferred in undertones, and Joan laughed in a relieved fashion. Then she leaned back to say, with what struck Bill as belated solicitude:

"I do hope you weren't hurt when Phil hurled that heavy box in on you!"

He told her stiffly that he believed no bones were broken.

"Why didn't you let us know that you were there?"

When they reached the Gardiners' entrance, the girl slipped out with the quickness that characterized all her movements. She leaned beside Jevons, while Dessez shouldered the heavy box and strode off with it.

"You won't say anything about this up at the house, will you?" she appealed.

"The Gardiners don't know, then? Mrs. Gardiner wouldn't like it, eh?"

It pleased Jevons to think that that plump, sweet woman above there did not countenance lawbreaking.

Joan drew a sharp breath.

"Sally wouldn't like it," she told him. "Oh, she'd hate it! Sally must never know!"

V

BACK in New York, business responsibilities engaged Jevons, and cold weather, setting in early, did not invite to country driving; but the memory of that night and the next morning's breakfast persisted for him with a peculiar and pleasant distinctness, not to be spoiled by the bitterness of those overheard strictures on himself. He could shut his eyes at any time and see the place in purple evening shadow, with the mountain summits sheened in unearthly gold, or clear in morning light, with the

pure color and meticulous finish of an illuminated picture.

Lovely Sally and her jolly children, the genial genius Ben, and the likable fellow with the thin, sensitive face who had showed for a few moments after breakfast—these, at least, Bill might hope had liked him as unaffectedly as he had liked them. Ned Young, indeed, had looked at him with a particular interest, he felt sure, and had even conveyed an odd impression of being sorry for him. To the sleek actor, Phil Dessez, Jevons had at no time felt greatly drawn; and as for the girl, he had brought himself to believe by now that he had thought little of her from the start.

Sally Gardiner had the soft curves that many men still admire, and the face of a Dutch Madonna. She had a darning basket at her elbow whenever she sat down, and she was engaged in rearing four healthy children—an ideal woman! But Arline was Bill's pick from the actual field, and the girl Joan, nonchalantly untidy, with her pose of intellectuality, her figure of an athletic adolescent boy, and her bobbed hair, needn't flatter herself that she could ever have engaged his attention!

These queer people, and the whole uncomfortable adventure, never came up for discussion between Bill and his wife. He had had enough to hear, on their way back to town, of the horrors of her night on a camp bed. She had said roundly that she wanted to forget the whole occurrence; but one night, at a successful new play, when Philip Dessez strolled on in one of the secondary rôles, Arline approved his performance and looked thoughtful between the acts. A few days later Bill came into his own drawing-room to find Dessez there drinking tea.

He sat down himself, and began to ask questions about the Gardiners. How was the musical show coming on? Were Ben and Sally, too, in town? And what about the nice fellow who he understood had tuberculosis, and his devoted sister?

Arline looked bored, and Bill accepted Dessez's perfunctory answers, and decided to get hold of him alone some time and find out more. He did not have long to wait for a better opportunity. He stumbled over the actor about his house very often that winter, and it happened soon enough that Arline caused herself to be waited for after having summoned him, so that it was a delicate attention on Bill's

part to entertain her caller until she should descend.

"The Gardiners? Why, they're flourishing, I guess," Dessez said vaguely. "'May Buds' is all done, except that I believe Ben is working over some of the songs. It could go into rehearsal to-morrow if we had a producer. I've seen forty people about it since I struck town, but you know what the theatrical situation is!"

Jevons didn't, but he nodded as if he knew all about the game.

"I'm surprised you find any trouble about getting it put on. It sounded to me like a darned good show."

"It is a darned good show, I'll tell the world! Properly put on, it should be a wow; but there are wheels within wheels in the theatrical game. Everybody in the business is as crooked as a dog's hind leg; and look at the rent situation—"

He went off into an exposition of rents and percentages on profits net and gross, with estimates of what the music publishers would pay for the music, and animadversions on the radio, which had lessened the value of the mechanical reproducing rights. Jevons heard him without trying to follow his intricate figuring, for all this was outside his own line of business.

"Oh, well," he said comfortingly, "if a thing's good—and we're agreed that 'May Buds' is first-class—it will make its own way sooner or later. Did you say the Gardiners were in town?"

"I think they plan to stick it out up there through the winter. Ben runs down if anybody wants to hear the music."

Bill sat bolt upright in consternation.

"Isn't it darned cold up there? How do they manage? What's the big idea?"

"Oh, they like it! It's healthy, there's a little village school that answers for the kids at their present age, and of course the Youngs would be there, anyhow. They have a very jolly time of it. I ran up last week-end, and had some skiing."

Bill saw a picture of white hills and the old house nestling under a snow-piled roof. There was a deep blue sky overhead, and in the foreground were people in knitted things, with cheeks like apples. It was an imaginary picture, but he put it away beside his actual ones.

"Winter sports—I see! And the house full of music always, and then they all play games in the evenings, and roast chestnuts and have mild hooch parties. You see I

haven't forgotten that jaunt of ours to the bootlegger's."

Dessez eyed him oddly.

"Mr. Jevons, did you really think there was whisky in that case we called for?"

Bill stared.

"What else?"

"Nearly everything else—coffee and tea, sugar and flour, tinned soups, and—well, you get the idea. Provisions for a month were in that box, as I should know who toted it what seemed like several miles!"

"Then why the heck all the mystery about it?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't tell you," replied the actor. "I don't see why it would hurt you to get a little insight into how the poor artist lives. Can you strain your imagination, Mr. Jevons, and picture to yourself the condition of not having any money at all? I've played around with your kind enough to know that when they talk about somebody being dog-poor, and not knowing where to lay his hands on a cent, they aren't counting some measly little ten thousand that rolls in as a matter of course every year, or every quarter, or perhaps every month. The Gardiners really haven't anything at all, beyond the little place up there that Ben's uncle left him, and the music in Ben's brains. Sally was a stenographer in a music publisher's office—and there you are. There's a cow, and there's a vegetable patch, and Sally has some chickens, but you have to have the flour and sugar and so on, to keep serving meals. God knows when they'd paid their last grocery bill. The day you blew in was the day when the store was supposed to deliver a month's supply of things. There was a regular place where they dumped them, as far up as the delivery cart could get. Happily Joan Young happened by there before anybody else. The box hadn't come, but there was a note, instead, stuck on a tree—the sort of note that only a mean Yankee storekeeper at the end of his patience could write. The sense of it was that the box was packed and ready according to Sally's list, and she could have it any time by bringing over the cash—that there'd be no more deliveries made until the bill was paid in full. I think myself that there was something to be said for the fellow, you know—natural he should want his money; but Joan went right up in the air. The Gardiners are her best friends in the world, and she swore that she'd fix

the storekeeper, and that Sally should never see his note, which she tore up. It wasn't, you understand, a closed letter—just a scrawl on one of his little yellow bill slips, stuck on a nail for all the world to see. Why, you might have read it yourself, if you'd come by an hour earlier. It was your turning up that gave her her idea."

"You don't mean she—"

"Joan is the sort that's up to anything. I've known her do crazier things than that. You were supposed to be sleeping in the house, if you recollect, so it seemed a simple matter to borrow the car for an hour, and a simpler one than you'd suppose to break into the store by the back way. We left the price of the things we took, of course, and a strong letter that seemed to do the trick, for Joan says there hasn't been a peep out of the fellow since, and the groceries are delivered smartly. I fancy she undertook to settle his account out of her own next quarter's money. She has some little income that she manages to get by on."

"And what about you?" Bill couldn't help asking.

"I? I've yet to see the time when I hadn't uses of my own for every cent I can lay my hands on!" said the young man. "I considered I did my share when I carried the box."

He enlarged further upon the weight of the box, and the crazy risk he had been led by the girl into taking, in actually breaking and entering the storekeeper's premises. His host heard him coldly, and did not rise to the suggestion he presently dangled—that a rich backer for the show could end the Gardiners' distresses in a moment; and presently Arline put in a late appearance.

Bill was in reality too much shocked to want to talk about the matter. Of a wealthy family, and successful in business, he had a certain naïveté about money, which he supposed, indeed, to be automatically at hand for every one speaking the language of cultivation. That a woman like Sally Gardiner should actually be without sufficient for her needs struck him as simply an outrage—an outrage about which something had to be done at once.

In almost the same moment the obvious thing to be done proclaimed itself, and he hugged the project to his bosom with satisfaction. He wasn't going to say anything to Arline about it, and certainly in

the first instance he wouldn't take it up with the actor fellow, whom, on closer acquaintance, he was finding that he didn't much like.

As an investment, the financing of a musical production was entirely outside of his experience; but even if he were to lose the money—fifteen thousand was the amount Dessez had said would be needed—the loss wouldn't be important to him. He meant that the outlay should buy him something he wanted—the friendship and consideration of the Gardiners, and of that girl, too, and a part in the fascinating game that he and Arline had interrupted nearly six months ago, and concerning which he had felt himself such a hopeless outsider.

He went into the matter in a business-like way the next morning, gathering information about the probable extent of the liabilities that he thought of assuming, the agents through whom he would have to work, and the exact situation in regard to available theaters. It was interesting to find that if he had a good thing, as he was sure he had, he would probably be putting himself in the way of making money at a faster rate than usual.

He was warned of the high percentage of plays that fail, but he remembered that the appeal of the musical comedy is to the tired business man, and—with a shade of bitterness even now—that he had been described as the exact norm of this engaging abstraction, and that he had been unquestionably pleased by both book and music.

With childish pleasure he began to turn over in his mind a little plan that had a strong appeal for him. Winter was over, already the weather was springlike, and before long there would be trout in the mountain streams. He thought he would announce to Arline one of his occasional departures on a business errand, and, instead, would go to the Gardiners and ask their permission to pitch a camp at their doors. There would be days of tramping and fishing, and nights of talk and smoke and song.

Perhaps on the first night, perhaps later—he would choose his time—he would say casually:

"Now what about the producing end of this show of yours? Have you a backer? How about letting me in on it? I believe in the show, and I can find the cash."

It turned cold again at the end of March, and then something of importance came up

at the office, and for a week or two it was out of the question for Bill to leave town. Still he played with his plan at intervals, and was inclined to be sharply annoyed, as at an infringed copyright, when Arline said to him one day:

"What would you think about my putting up the money for Phil Dessez's show?"

"Your putting it up?" he demanded, the disagreeable emphasis on the possessive pronoun not being intended at all as a reminder that it could only be his money she could use, although it rather sounded that way.

"Well, why not?" she countered defiantly. "It would only be some very small sum—less than I dropped at Havre de Grace; and who knows?—I might make a big profit. Anyhow, it would be amusing—something to take an interest in."

"Oh!" Bill said. He was not used to opposing her expressed wishes, but he felt deeply unwilling to forward this one. "Listen, Arline," he appealed. "Let it ride for awhile, will you? I'm up to my neck down town just now, and in a few days I expect to have to go West on business. Please don't say a word to Dessez about such an idea until I get back. Will you promise?"

She promised, because she was really in no great hurry about the matter, and was amusing herself sufficiently, so far, by raising Dessez's hopes. The situation between these two was developing fast. The aspiring playwright and actor had laid siege to Arline deliberately, with interested motives, from the time of their first meeting in town, when he had observed, with the sharp perception of his kind in these matters, that he had the luck to interest her.

He promptly informed himself of Jevons's financial rating, and began to indulge in some audacious daydreaming. Before this possibility occurred to him he had canvassed for a production in every quarter, and had met rebuffs enough to cause him to look on his vacation's work as wasted. There were, as he had told Jevons, wheels within wheels; there were insuperably complicated difficulties about theaters, and there was an apparently concerted unwillingness to risk a substantial sum of money on the music of an unknown composer and the book of a man who had scored only an unimportant success or two with vaudeville sketches.

For some months, accordingly, Dessez

used all his arts on Arline. His methods had subtlety and delicacy, and required time for their development, but he considered that they would be all the more surely effective in the long run.

But the game, as he had felt for some weeks now, was getting out of his hands. Arline Jevons was a very beautiful woman of a type he had supposed he knew and could class, but the strength of whose familiar allure he was finding that he had underestimated. He was feeling as a man feels who falls back, in the absence of finer vintages, on some commonplace but heady drink, and discovers that it is getting the mastery of him; or as one who goes reluctantly to hear some hackneyed, passion-drenched Italian opera for the hundredth time, to succumb again to its spell while the sensuous music is in his ears.

He thought little of Arline when he was away from her; but with her he had more than once already lost his head.

VI

JEVONS felt like a boy let out of school as he parked his roadster at the foot of the hill and started up it on foot. The day was perfect, its spring sky set with embellishing small puffs of cloud, lavender-shadowed on their under sides. The leafage in the woods was still more yellow than green, and the carpet of little uncurling ferns and moss was sprinkled with anemones, hepaticas, and violets.

It seemed a pity that the first person he met should have to be Joan Young, who was sauntering down the hill as he strode up; but he had left that matter to chance, having announced only a probability that he would arrive some time during the week, and having made no arrangements beyond the acquisition of camping rights and the Gardiners' assurance that they would not object to his proximity—which, after all, was not very close.

He thought Joan looked at him rather strangely as they greeted each other.

"It seems such a funny thing for you to want to do!" she marveled. "You know, this is the jumping-off place. We've no clubhouses and Turkish baths and golf courses—nothing but nature unadorned. We're neolithic!"

"But you like it," he reminded her.

"Oh, I! I'm different."

"Perhaps you're not so different as you think," Bill couldn't help telling her.

She seemed struck by this. "I wonder!" she said thoughtfully. "I don't live like this just because I like it. It was because my brother couldn't live anywhere else; and now, when perhaps he might be able to, I'm quite out of everything, and the managers have forgotten I ever existed. I was in town, making the rounds of the offices, for a couple of months last winter, without turning up a thing. So far as I can see, my only chance would be if 'May Buds' should go on and I could do *Peggy*. Now where are you going to pitch your tent? It came all right, by the way, and they put it in the old barn with the other things. The boys can't keep away from them. You'll have plenty of volunteer helpers when you come to set it up."

She turned and walked back beside him. Bill had not thought of her before as one of the beneficiaries of the intervention he had decided on, but it occurred to him now that she stood to profit as much as any one else. Not only would she share as writer of the lyrics, but she was assured of a good part for her return to Broadway.

One of the small Gardiners saw them, flung up an arm in excited salute, and dashed to the house to announce their approach. When they reached the steps, the family were all there to greet him, with an evident pleasure in his arrival that Bill found heart-warming. Almost at once they went in procession to the barn, to inspect his camp outfit.

"Lunch first!" said Sally. "You'll have it with us, of course, Mr. Jevons!"

Immediately afterward began the business of choosing a site, erecting the tent, and unpacking the boxes.

Everything was as Bill had hoped it was going to be, only better, with those little trimmings of spring fragrances and white cherry trees posturing against dark pines and glamorous twilights and magic sunrises, which the most ardent imagination cannot supply. The children were funny and companionable, and Sally—he was told almost at once that he must call her "Sally," because everybody did—smiled slowly and sweetly on her world, and Ben turned out to cast a wicked line of his own among the trout.

Bill did not at once spring his proposal about backing the show. He did not want to appear to have arrived primed with it, but rather to wait for the subject to come up of itself, and then to drop his sugges-

tion with a finely casual effect. In the meantime he was testing out his popularity for himself alone, and finding, with much satisfaction, that he was liked and accepted.

Even Joan Young was ready to take long walks with him, and he was pleased by this, although, to be sure, she had not a wide choice of companions. Over the lunch basket and subsequent cigarettes they inevitably grew confidential. He heard some of the girl's difficulties and setbacks, told with a light irony, and of her few successes.

"Then Ned needed me, you see, and I had to refuse the much better part I was to have had in the next play; but he's doing so well lately—the doctor thinks the disease is really arrested, as they call it. So my ambitions are beginning to revive again, like grass when you stop trampling it. I'm not so terribly old, really!"

Bill eyed her covertly. She looked about fifteen to-day, with the hot color in her cheeks that the last stiff bit of climbing had set there, with her eyes wide and dream-filled and her bare head tousled. The other night he had thought her almost haggard. He perceived that she was an actress, and would always look the age she happened to be feeling. He told her this, and pleased her greatly.

Presently he was giving her his confidences in return for hers—how he had always been bored with conventional things, and had thought it would be much nicer to be an artist, or an explorer, or an adventurer of some sort, than what he was; how Arline didn't like the same things he did, and he had always supposed this to reflect the natural cleavage between the sexes—to which theory Joan vigorously demurred.

There were many such walks and talks, and so frank and friendly did the girl show herself that Jevons might have flattered himself she really liked him, if he had been able to forget that interchange of opinions about him, between her and Dessez, which he had overheard on the night of their first meeting. Sometimes, for days at a time, he did forget that she thought him the perfect type of that tired business man whom she served and despised.

It was in the middle of his second week in camp that the opportunity for which Bill had been waiting occurred. Joan, in a pause of the talk about the camp fire, began to hum absently a song from "May Buds," and Jevons pounced.

"Isn't that the opening number from the second act of—"

Joan stopped abruptly, and was asking, before he could finish his question:

"Won't somebody have some more coffee? There's heaps of it, and cream, going to waste—"

"Don't talk about 'May Buds,' Bill," said Sally, in a woebegone voice. "We never do. It's a bitter disappointment. Phil Dessez has seen everybody about it, and Ben's been to town and played over the music a dozen times. We've given up hope, and he's working on something else now."

"Oh!" said Jevons awkwardly. "But—but, see here, 'May Buds' is a darned good show!"

"Of course it's a good show!" Sally flared, as if he had criticized it.

"We know it's a good show," Joan said; "all but the lyrics, which are rotten."

"It's damned good, lyrics and all!" Ben boomed.

"Well, then, why can't I back it? What's the matter with my putting up fifteen thousand, or twenty, say, and the show going on early this summer?"

There ensued, to this, complete silence.

Bill felt disappointed, having looked for enthusiasm, and he had a chilly moment of wondering if his offer had sounded officious and patronizing. Then he saw that Ben's eyes and Sally's were hanging together across the fire, and that his coffee cup in Joan's hands was shaking so that the saucer was flooded.

Into the silence Sally spoke at last, in a very small voice, and she seemed to be addressing the company:

"Do you suppose he really means it?"

"Well, I generally mean what I say!" he cried hotly. "I'd love to do this. I can find the money without any difficulty, and I was only afraid you wouldn't be willing to let me in on it. I'm a business man. I know a good thing when I see it, and I'll write a check for an advance right now, to clinch the bargain, if Ben says the word!"

Sally came across and kissed him.

Bill turned hopefully to Joan after that, but she only gave him her hand in a nervous squeeze.

VII

By a dozen words and a few pen strokes Jevons had made the entire community

happy. Sally had laid the ghost of many a haunting debt, and was suddenly in a position to supply as many long-felt needs. To each of the children was assigned ten dollars to blow, as their share of the family good fortune, and they pored with their tongues out over those pages of the mail order catalogues dealing with baseball gloves, fishing rods, and the like. Ben was drunk with the first juices of the success he had waited for so long, and Joan thrilled to the opportunity before her, while her brother rejoiced that, after all, his inopportune illness had not scotched her career forever.

Out of pure delicacy, lest his presence should seem to demand the expression of further gratitude, Bill went that day to whip a trout stream at a considerable distance from the scene.

It was the warmest afternoon of the spring. Ben was in possession of the house, trying over monotonously certain passages of the "May Buds" music which he thought he could improve. Under the blossoming apple trees in the orchard sat Sally, with a pencil and a list, and the children with the fat mail order catalogue, tattered by their eager thumbings. Presently the Youngs strolled down from above, and sank on the petal-sprinkled grass. Joan wore a happy, congratulatory grin, but—

"Something will happen," Sally said positively, looking up from her sums. "I'm spending the money, but I know in my bones that 'May Buds' will never really go on. Our jinx is far too powerful to lose out so easily. Bill Jevons will fail for a billion dollars to-morrow, or a rattlesnake will bite him to-day, and of course that disagreeable wife of his would never carry out his wishes!"

"The one thing anybody knows for certain about luck," Ned contributed, "is that it's bound to change. You and Ben have been playing in the toughest kind so long that there's nothing more natural than a break your way."

"No, because ours isn't plain bad luck—it's a jinx. It's perfectly understandable. I have him and he has me, and we both have the youngsters—all well, all fond of one another. Naturally the gods are jealous! If Ben had written all the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and 'Floradora' and 'The Arcadians' and 'Rose-Marie,' there'd never a note of any of them have been heard on Broadway. Something will

happen to keep 'May Buds' off the boards—you mark my words!"

"I think I will buy you a New Thought book, darling," said Joan.

Over the top of the hill appeared two people, whom Ned noticed first, and at whom he stared, puzzled, for a moment before he called the attention of the others.

"Who's that coming along the road—can anybody make out? The man is Phil, I think, but he has some awfully flossy female with him that I don't—oh!"

He recognized the woman, with some surprise, but it was Sally who named her:

"Mrs. Jevons! Our angel Bill's wife, so we must be nice to her, but I must say—"

"No, you mustn't. You needn't," Joan reproved. "Phil will be pleased; or does he know already? Oh, he's leaving her and coming ahead—that's nice!"

Dessez, indeed, was running toward them, while Arline strolled with stately slowness and an occasional pause for admiring the view. He reached them far ahead of her, kissed everybody but Young hastily, and fell into one of his easy, graceful attitudes on the grass. They all looked at him expectantly.

"We came here," he began. "You know, there are really so amazingly few places where you can go. One doesn't want to be vulgar and furtive. Of course, Sally, I knew you'd understand. I've ordered all sorts of rather *de luxe* camping things sent up, and in this weather I really think we can make her comfortable for just a little while. It's Mrs. Jevons—the wife of that bonehead T.B.M. who dropped in here last fall. We've been meeting all winter, and we adore each other. I know I don't need to ask you all to be awfully, specially, imaginatively nice to her, do I?"

His handsome, expressive eyes roved from face to face, confident at first, but gradually taking a shade of disconcertment. Nobody said anything. Joan's underlip was caught between her teeth. Ned Young, white and frowning, got to his feet and moved away in the direction of his tent without a word, while Sally Gardiner seemed to be on the point of bursting into tears.

Arline was almost upon them. In a few moments it would look awkward if they did not rise to greet her.

"What's the matter with you all, anyhow?" Dessez demanded, a ring of indig-

nation in his voice. "We love each other, I tell you! It's the real thing, it's too strong for us, and she's coming to me altogether. It can't be—you aren't Philistines and bourgeois conventionalists—"

"D-didn't I tell you?" Sally muttered. "Didn't I say—" She squeezed her eyelids tight together, dabbed at the tears that emerged, summoned a piteous smile, and advanced to meet Arline. "Mrs. Jevons! This is a surprise!"

"Phil assured me you would all readily understand—"

"Well, as to that—of course, ordinarily, but—you see, we like him—your husband. He's become—our friend."

"Like him!" cried Dessez. "Why, you don't know him, and he's nothing to know if you did—just an ordinary, run-of-the-mill *Babbitt*. Sally, frankly, I don't understand you—nor you, Joan, sitting there with your mouth screwed up like the wife of a Sunday school superintendent!"

"He's here," Joan vouchsafed, looking from Phil to Arline, and back again, to see the effect of her words. "He's been here for ten days. He's not a *Babbitt*; we all rather love him, and—this will hit you where you live, Phil Dessez—he was going to back the show!"

The man showed a stunned dismay, but Arline's eyes flashed only impatience.

"Here! Of all things! Then it's no place for us!"

"We'll be getting on," Dessez muttered. "Sally, I say, I'm sorry as hell we queered the deal for you; but this is one of those things—it's serious, I'm telling you. I never meant it to be. You know how it is yourself."

"Oh, come on, Phil! I'm not specially anxious to meet my husband, and we'll have to make new plans. We'll have to get somewhere to spend the night. The nearest town with a decent hotel—"

"The summer places aren't open yet. We'll have to make Huntersville. We can do that all right—forty miles, but a good road after we hit it. Sally—Joan—good-by! I'm sorry as hell—"

The lovers hurriedly retreated, and disappeared over the brow of the hill. Sally sat staring after them, pallid and still, but her eyes were dry until her little daughter ran up to her and thrust a flopping catalogue under her nose. To Betty the irruption of the elopers had merely meant a tiresome first claim on mother's attention.

She was free now to be shown the doll's bedstead over which the child had been gloating.

"Thirty-six T two-five-seven-nine!" she pronounced quite glibly and triumphantly. "Muvver, isn't it *ducky*? It's only two dollars and sixty-nine cents, and I'm going to get it, and this tea set, and—lookit, muvver, lookit!"

"Yes, darling—it's very pretty, it's—Joan, *shall we have to give back that advance now?*"

"I suppose—I'm afraid—oh, of course we must! How I hate Phil Dessez—and that woman! I hope they're absolutely wretched and scratch each other's eyes out!"

"Betty," said Sally in a strained, high voice, "you can't have the tea set or the bedstead, after all—nor you, boys. There isn't going to be any money. Mother's—very sorry."

She gulped over the last words, and, getting up hastily, walked away, so that her children should not see her crying.

Joan stood for a moment looking after her. Then she put the wailing Betty aside with a quick, "You shall have the *ducky* bedstead, dear—Aunt Joan will get you that," and made for her own encampment.

VIII

NED YOUNG, sitting on the steps of his tent, was busy over a bit of wood carving when his sister came up and dropped on the grass beside him.

"So the bottom's out of our bit of luck," she remarked bitterly. "Odd! It's just as poor Sally said—such things couldn't happen to the likes of us; and the maddening part of it is that there's absolutely nothing to be done. We have to sit by and see all our prospects swamped, just because two utterly selfish people have no morals and no consideration. They've gone on to Huntersville—I'm happy to say that, at least."

"There might have been something to be done," Ned said, "if I could have seen her."

"You! What could you have said? Why should she have cared?"

"I could have told her that I'd have her locked up for bigamy if she didn't call this thing off. You see, Joan—I didn't tell you this before, for it would only have upset you, but she's really—my wife. She's the woman who walked out on me."

"That creature!" Joan cried. She pulled herself to her feet, shaking all over with barked hatred. "Well, you ought to have told me before—while she was here! I'd have—I'd have done her an injury. Well, I'd have told her what I thought of her, anyhow. Why, one of the things I've wanted most for years was to come face to face with that woman, and tell her a few things!"

He leaned over and patted his sister's hand.

"Nothing gained by that sort of thing. I should have gone on keeping it dark, only it struck me that she might be brought to time with a threat. She's put herself within reach of the law. She never divorced me—figured on my being safely dead when she married, of course."

"But then—she isn't his wife at all!" Joan made the discovery with an odd little thrill of satisfaction. "She might as well be with Phil as with him, as far as that goes. Bill was never married to her at all!"

"No."

She plunged her face in her hands.

"Let me think. They were going to Huntersville. They were in a car, of course, but they had to walk back to where they left it, and they started from here not more than twenty minutes ago. It might be possible to head them off by the short cut over the mountain. That paved road goes all around, in loops and loops."

Ned got up.

"I'll start right away," he said.

"Not you, crazy! It would be the end of you—a climb like that. It's going to rain, too, I think. It's looked like a storm all day. No, I'll go. I'd like to go. I shall enjoy having it out with her!"

Joan dashed into her tent, slipped out of her flowered voile, and reappeared in knickers and flannel shirt.

"I'm off! You might go down and tell Sally not to despair yet. I shall only stipulate for their waiting till the show goes on, so they'll scarcely refuse. Heaven knows I don't want her to go on poisoning poor Bill's life by posing as his wife. Of course, don't say a word to anybody else!"

The mountain that rose above them had a deep notch between its two peaks, and, plunging into the woods, Joan worked toward this cleft. There was not even a blazed trail to guide her, but she was familiar with the mountain, and had often

crossed it at its lowest point. From the ridge, once gained, you looked down and saw the town below, and the automobile road approaching it. Except for the chance of a storm, and early darkness with it, there was no great physical difficulty in the expedition.

But it was already thundering, with the long, dull reverberations of mountain thunder, when Ned reached the house. He found the Gardiners on the porch, palely admiring the string of fish that Jevons had brought home. Sally looked tragic, Ben stricken, and Bill puzzled by the change in a family that he had left so cheerful. The air was heavy and lifeless, and the children, who felt keenly their share in the general disappointment, were for once fretful and quarrelsome.

"Where's your sister?" Jevons asked. "She jeered at my catch yesterday. I'd like to show her these!"

"Oh, she's up on the mountain somewhere. Got into her knickers and went for a hike. We're to expect her back when we see her."

"But, great Scott, you oughtn't to have let her do that! It's going to storm. She's crazy! She'll get drowned, or struck by lightning!"

"You try to stop Joan when she wants to do something," suggested her brother.

The gloom thickened as the clouds massed blacker overhead. Thunder circled the mountains again. It was hotter than it had been all day. Presently lightning twinkled vividly, and Betty climbed up on her father's lap and hid her face on his shoulder. A dank wind rushed up the valley, eddied, and fell. Then, all of a sudden, it grew nearly as dark as night, and the storm broke.

For a few minutes the thunder was deafening and almost continuous, and in the brief intervals the drum of the rain on the roof made it necessary to shout to be heard. Lightning stabbed and dazzled, and Sally withdrew indoors with the children, while the three men lingered uneasily on the porch.

"Better turn out and have a look for that fool girl about now," Ben grumbled. "Not that there's a chance on earth of finding her!"

"Which way did she go?" Jevons demanded. "Have you any idea?"

"She was heading for the notch there," her brother explained guiltily. "I'd be

darned grateful if you fellows would go after her. She may have had the sense to turn back of herself. Go up to our camp first, I would, and see if she's there."

They supplied themselves with oilskins and flashes, and climbed off into what was still a heavy downpour. The camp was dark and devastated, for Ned, in his trouble of mind, had not thought to close flaps and loosen guy ropes. One tent was half down, and both beds were soaked with entering rain. Ben stopped to prevent further damage, but Jevons pushed ahead.

"I'm bearing a little to the right," he called back. "You go to the left when you get through there."

He entered the woods. They gave little or no shelter at this time of year, and the lightning showed far leafless vistas, but no Joan. From time to time he shouted, but no response came. He followed a water-course, dry that morning, now rushing, for some half mile, while the storm beat over him unabated.

Then, obliterating the noise of the thunder, a sound like fifty detonations at once split his ears—a sound that took Bill back to his brief experience of war. The skies were lit by a glare that did not fade in the instant of its appearance. The mountain-side rocked, and he stumbled to his knees.

Still the light hadn't died. It was brighter than ever, red and sinister. It came from the other side of the mountain, down there where he had walked one day with Joan, and passed the little huts marked "danger"—the little huts stored with explosives to be used in the work going forward on the near-by dam.

Bill got up and climbed on. It was easy to guess what had happened. One of the storage huts had been struck by lightning, or more probably a tree above it had drawn the charge, falling with a crash upon the powder, or sending sparks down to find it.

There was no reason to suppose that Joan was anywhere near the spot where, to judge from the light in the sky, a merry little forest fire was burning. There was no danger, for with rain falling like this the fire must soon be out. Besides, Joan wouldn't have gone so far as those huts; but Bill wished that she would answer his calls, and he called louder and more often. All the time he was struggling savagely up the last steep ascent of the mountain, which was rough, and set with disconcertingly loose stones.

He stood on the ridge at last. The low clouds, reflecting the fire beneath, spread a light by which he could make out the general features of the scene. The golden eye of an automobile swept a path across the dusk of the plain, showing where the paved road ran.

Turning now, he looked down into the valley he had left. They were to have lit a bonfire if Joan had returned, and he could see no glimmer of such a thing, though the light of the house itself was clear, a tiny star far below him.

He whistled, and plunged down the farther slope, slipping and almost falling more than once, playing his flash charily now, for its light was perceptibly weakening and must be saved for the return journey. Though the descent was more slippery and difficult than the upward climb had been, it set no great strain on the lungs, and he could shout lustily, and did.

At one point he stopped, cursing his search as hopeless. The mountain flank ran for miles in each direction, cut into little valleys by ridge and hummock. There was no path, and his voice could carry no great distance above the singing of the rain, the thrashing of trees in the wind, and the incessant rumble that the thunder kept up when it was not crashing overhead. He might as well go back, he thought. Perhaps by now the girl's safe return was being signaled.

It was not the thought of Joan that decided him to go on, but a boyish curiosity to see that forest fire closer. Fires had always fascinated Bill, and even in town he would promptly leave his desk to watch the engines go by. It happened that he had never seen trees burning, and the chance of such a sight, to be enjoyed without danger or responsibility, was not to be missed.

He went on, and as he came nearer to the zone of the fire its light made going easier. He forgot Joan, forgot to shout, but as a dead tree to leeward of him caught with a crackle and shower of sparks, he uttered involuntarily a sharp whistle of appreciation at the sight.

Her answering cry came from very near, startlingly between him and the fire. As he ran toward it, he concluded that she, too, had stopped to watch the fantastic beauty of the spectacle. He called her name in relief and congratulation.

Then a great cloud of smoke that had

been rolling close to the ground, gray-black, puffed and rose above a clear burst of flame, and he saw her. Huddled and twisted as far from the fire as she could recoil, she lay, pinned down by a fallen tree that pressed unescapably across one knee. She lifted her face, wild with sudden hope and scorched with heat, from her arm that had been sheltering it, and after a moment's voiceless stare she spoke in a strangled voice:

"I can't pull free of it. Isn't it absurd? I've tried and tried. It's somehow—stuck. Oh, do you think you can get me out before the fire gets to me?"

It was appallingly close already, and stealing swiftly closer in one of those intervals not uncommon in thunderstorms, when the rain spits languidly, holding off altogether for appreciable periods, to come with a fierce rush again—perhaps too late.

The force of the explosion, they decided afterward, had cracked the rocky sides of a crevice in which the tree grew, precariously rooted at best, so that it had toppled at such an angle to the slope on which Joan, flung off her feet at the same moment, lay sprawled, as to hold her helpless. Jevons, setting his own muscles, with every advantage of position and leverage, to the task of freeing her, realized that not even the terror of the licking, rolling yellow flames, not even the sting of them when they reached her, could have given the girl so pinned the strength to release herself.

Working in frantic haste, choked and blinded when a shift of wind drove the smoke in his face, he found a stout stick, braced one end of it in an angle of bowlder, and, by throwing on the other end every ounce of his own weight, he managed to lift the trunk the bare inch or two that allowed Joan to withdraw her cramped, bruised leg from beneath it. Then he caught her up and retreated with her to a safe distance.

She was trembling violently, on the sudden ending of her long, tense expectation of the most hideous of deaths, and Bill kept his arms around her to support her. For himself, the realization of her danger, and the action which saved her, had been so nearly simultaneous that he was scarcely more upset than when, after a close shave on the road, he exclaimed "Golly!" and took the next half dozen breaths a little deeper than usual; but Joan, not unnaturally, was completely unnerved.

"You had no business to go off like that, with the storm coming, and all by yourself," he told her roughly, when the soothing things he had tried first had no effect on her but to make her cry. "What possessed you to do such a crazy thing, anyhow?"

She caught her breath at that, and when the next sob shook her it was at least a dry one.

"Why did I, indeed?" she repeated bitterly. "I might as well have stayed at home. I was too late!"

She became aware that his arms were around her, and gave a little movement of recoil and straightening that caused him to drop them.

"Too late for what? To see the sun set? That's the only scheduled entertainment I know of around here. You must have seen it was going to rain to-night, so even that was called off!"

She was rapidly recovering her self-possession, steadied by the reminder of the catastrophe that she had not, after all, averted. It was of Bill Jevons, and of what it must mean to him that the woman he supposed to be his wife had left him, that she was thinking now, rather than of her prospects and the Gardiners' prospects, gone down in ruin together. Joan was scarcely sorry for him at all, as her method of breaking the news showed.

"I think I ought to congratulate you," she said.

"On finding you? Why, I do, too."

"Oh, that! No, something as different as possible."

In a dozen stark sentences she told him the truth, and the whole truth of his position and Arline's. He tried to interrupt her at first, to contradict angrily and cut her short; but the full knowledge out of which she spoke carried conviction, and soon he was listening in silence, with no more comment than a gasp or two out of the darkness to which he instinctively turned his face.

"You haven't lost anything!" she assured him again, and her voice had a cruel little ring of contempt for Arline, or for any man fool enough to set value on that kind of an Arline.

Bill had lost his main illusion and the dominant influence of his life. He could not tell himself that he still loved his supposed wife, now that her perfidy and baseness stood revealed; but neither could he

shrug off the emotional habit of three years in as many minutes.

"Would you mind talking about something else?" he said dully.

"It's we who've suffered a loss," Joan complied. "Sally and Ben and I, I mean. You probably never realized what it meant to us—the hope that you were going to put on the show, that Ben was to have his hearing at last, and I my chance!"

"I don't know what you're talking about now. I don't get you. Nobody told me there was any hitch about the show."

"Nobody told you!" she cried. "No, and we're not waiting for you to tell us, either. Of course you're not going to put up money for a show that's half Phil Dessez's! Nobody expects it of you, I assure you!"

Bill had some difficulty in bringing his thoughts from his own disaster to this side issue.

"I don't see why not," he said heavily. "I wasn't thinking about Dessez when I first offered to come in. Naturally, I'd like to wring his neck for him; but so far as the money end goes, I'd rather he had enough to take care of her. Unless the objection comes from somewhere else, the arrangement goes through as before, for all of me."

"Do you m-mean that?" the girl stammered, after a moment's astounded pause. "It's—quixotic, really! It's—too sporting for words!"

"It's part of my general boneheadedness not to say things that I don't mean."

"Oh, I want to get home and tell Sally!" Joan was suddenly exuberant. "How do we get home, by the way? I can limp a little"—she got to her feet and gingerly proved this—"but climb that mountain I can't possibly!"

"There must be some sort of track from the powder sheds to the lower road, and if we can get down there we can hold up a car."

They managed it, with difficulty enough. Part of the way Bill carried her, against her protest. It was the girl's instinct, fostered by the circumstances of her life, to rely on herself alone and ask no help of any one; but she found it good, if a little embarrassing—tired and overwrought as she was to-night—to hook one arm around Bill Jevons's robust neck and to let her slight weight sag against his arms and chest. They talked little as he beat his

way through wet undergrowth to the trail, each being deep in mental adjustment. Not until, by good luck, they had reached the motor road and almost at once stopped a car to take them home, did Joan remember to say:

"I ought to thank you for saving my life. I didn't, did I?"

"I forget; but we'll take it as said, and I'll say, 'Not at all,' or, what in this case seems a shade more graceful, 'You're welcome!' After all, you got yourself into trouble on my account."

For the first time, as he spoke, Jevons was visited by a realizing sense of what his nonappearance at the crucial moment would have meant. He leaned toward Joan, relaxed in her corner of the rear seat, and clutched her hand.

"I'm darned glad I turned up!" he muttered warmly.

Her hand, strong for all its girlish slenderness, gripped his in return, and he found so much comfort in the clasp that he did not let it go. He was feeling lonely and ill used. Arline had made a fool of him and left him; and yet, at the same time, a sense of exhilaration was stealing through him. She had left behind her, in place of her enslaving self, a priceless gift—freedom!

For three years Bill's life had been ruled by her caprices. He hadn't been able to make a plan or take a step without reference to her, and in order to provide money enough to satisfy her he had had to overwork constantly. Never had she showed herself appreciative or contented. On the contrary, her incessant criticism of all that he did and was had all but induced in him an inferiority complex.

He was his own man again now, and the feeling of loneliness that had oppressed him on the mountain was lessening moment by moment with the contact of Joan's hand. How different was this girl beside him from Arline! Loyal, straight, utterly unselfish, he knew her, having in her life almost none of the things that women demand, but blithely courageous always, missing the humor in nothing, spirited, sweet.

Bill was not given to questioning accepted forms. If Arline had not broken what he had believed to be their marriage, he might never have realized what dawned on him now as he contemplated Joan's profile, softly dark against the grayness through which they moved.

Why, he loved her! For ever so long he had not really loved Arline—he had only carried her yoke. Here was a girl to love, to reward love. Here was his mate!

His hand tightened on hers spasmodically with the thought; but almost at once hers pulled away, and Bill came to earth.

Once more he was making a fool of himself. It was all very well for him to love Joan, but unfortunately he knew, without asking, what she thought of him. Her letting him hold her hand till now was nothing—mere gratitude because he had saved her life. On the day when he had first set eyes on her, he had heard her judgment of him. He was "the complete bonehead"—"the tired business man." He certainly was not going to expose himself to hearing that again, by any petition to the girl who thought it.

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed.

It was then that Joan said the unimaginable thing:

"Please don't squeeze my hand unless you mean it! You've made me care—too much—"

"Joan!"

"I can't help it—I do! You come up here and stay around, and are so jolly and helpful and sporting always—and then turning up to-night just when I was expecting to be roasted alive—and then, on top of that, showing yourself so outrageously generous about the show! What's a poor girl to do, when she's only known self-centered geniuses like Ben, or conceited rotters like Phil Dessez?"

"I thought you despised me," he said huskily, "as a typical bonehead business man. You see, I heard you and Dessez talking about me once. I'd never have let you be the one to say it, except for that. You're all I want on earth, Joan—but how could I suppose you were for me?"

She came into his arms with a happy sigh.

"Did I really say horrid things about you? If I did, I've changed my mind since. What were they?"

"You called me a tired business man!"

"And aren't you a business man?"

"More or less, but I'm not tired!"

"Well, if you aren't, you ought to be, considering all you've done and been through to-day. You're my tired business man, and I don't care how tired you are, so long as you never get tired of me!"

THE END